
This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

GoogleTM books

<https://books.google.com>



NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 10594 4643

NCW

Digitized by Google Vaizey

PROPERTY
of the
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY



"The next moment she burst into a peal of laughter"
(see page 14).

A HONEYMOON IN HIDING

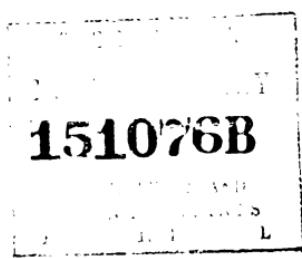
BY

MRS. G. DE HORNE VAIZEY

*Author of "How Like the King,"
"A Rose-Coloured Thread,"
etc. etc.*

With a Frontispiece by
HOWARD SOMERVILLE

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD.
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1911
60



PRO^{TE}
OF
CENTRAL
EXAMINATIONS
NEW DELHI
GOVERNMENT

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. ANTICIPATIONS	I
2. THE LOST NOTES	8
3. THE HOME-COMING.	25
4. "AS I OTHERS SEE US!"	50
5. A RAMBLE	66
6. THE WAXWORK MODEL	82
7. DISCOVERED	102
8. END OF THE HONEYMOON	114

A HONEYMOON IN HIDING

CHAPTER I

ANTICIPATIONS

“ONLY another day! I can’t believe it. This time to-morrow you will be my wife. You will have a wedding-ring on your finger, and a Mrs. to your name; you will be Mrs. Pat Hilbert, and little Gwen Nugent will be no more. Bless her little heart, she was a sweet thing, but Gwen Hilbert—Gwen Hilbert will be just a thousand times sweeter! I’m going to love her a thousand times more. Don’t I wish it were three o’clock to-morrow afternoon when all the flustration was over, and we were safely started on our honeymoon!”

“I don’t. Not I. It’s my very own wedding, and I’m going to enjoy every moment of the day. I’ve the prettiest



A Honeymoon in Hiding

dress, and the prettiest bridesmaids, and the prettiest presents that were ever seen, and if you were a polite bridegroom you'd have interrupted me before now to say that I was the prettiest bride. And I'll simply *love* walking up the aisle and seeing all the people craning and staring just for the privilege of seeing *Me*, and seeing you standing there waiting, and feeling that it's really and truly true at last, and we are going to be married ! The service part itself is solemn, but you and I are so perfectly, utterly one, that it's a beautiful solemnity, for we are only longing to be bound. How will you feel when he says :—‘I do now pronounce them man and wife,’ and the organ peals out, *Tum—tum—te rum tum tum tum?*” Gwen's right hand strummed an impassioned bar from the “Wedding March,” on her lover's knee. “I've sat listening to it so many times—from a back pew—feeling so flat and dull, knowing that I had to go home to darn stockings and eat cold mutton for dinner, but this time it will be for *Me*, that glorious crash of



Anticipations

sound! for You and Me, and *I'll* be the bride coming floating down the aisle, with my veil thrown back, smiling at the back pews out of my beautiful new world. Oh, I'll love it, I'll love it! And you, poor dear, you might as well love it too, and be aisey. Nobody'll look at *you*. You'll be hidden by my veil and my train and my flowers, and no one will give you a second thought. It's Gwen Nugent's day. Exit Gwen Nugent in a blaze of glory. She's going to marry a doctor; a poor, struggling, unknown G.P., and be good and industrious ever after. Amen. Kiss me at once!"

The prospective bridegroom obeyed expansively, and with admirable despatch. Then he rumpled his hair and sighed, and said :

"Yes. Poor! That's the deuce of it. I can't help worrying about the house, and wondering if we have done right in undertaking such a big rent. I can't bear to think that you may feel tight, and have to do without things you have been accustomed to. If the practice does as

A Honeymoon in Hiding

well as we expect, we ought to be pretty comfortable in a few years, but this furnishing business is horribly expensive—and just for the moment——”

“ I know. We’ve got to look at every sixpence before we spend it, and turn it over several times and reflect seriously if threepence wouldn’t do instead. Who cares? I don’t. We shall have each other, and piles of new clothes, and a houseful of new old furniture, and all the pots and pans and brooms and brushes and uninteresting etceteras spick and span, so that the cook won’t have to say every second day, ‘ I shall require a blacking-brush and two new saucepans.’ (That’s the way the money goes!) And if you grumble about your food, I can always retort that you *told* me to be economical. Did you call in at the house to-day as you passed? How is its dear little self? ”

“ I did. It is looking wonderfully straight and settled. The boxes you sent in are locked up in the spare room, and I’ve got the key on my bunch. I’ve written to the police to keep a sharp look-

Anticipations

out, and asked them to warn the neighbours on both sides that the house is empty. It's insured, too, against fire and burglary, so I think we have taken all precautions. The maids are to go in two days before we arrive, aren't they ? Sure that's enough ? "

" Quite ! There's nothing to do but to dust and stoke and get in provisions. I'll put out the knick-knacks myself. Cousin Emily has been badgering me to let her do it. As if I would ! People are so officious about a new house ; especially unmarried cousins ; they are capable of arranging the whole thing while you are away, and of expecting you to be pleased and grateful. That's why I insisted upon getting everything ready before we leave. They think we are mad not to leave a caretaker in charge, but I know what *that* would mean—cousins popping in from morning to night, fussing and 'improving,' and I won't allow anyone to improve my own home but its own mistress. We had quite a scene on the subject ; they thought I was very ungrateful, and to appease

A Honeymoon in Hiding

them I had to agree that they might look in once or twice as they were driving past, just 'to see that all was right.' They have a key, but I don't think they will attempt any alterations now. . . . I'm longing to get into our own house, Pat ! You are going to have a house of your own, Pat ! *And a honeymoon. Do you realise it ? Do you tremble ? It's commonly agreed that a honeymoon is a most critical and disillusionising experience. I've read reams about it in the magazine pages of newspapers. . . . 'For the first time these two young people find themselves left alone to their own resources. The rain falls, the wind howls against the panes of the country hotel. A feeling of deadly ennui possesses the groom.'* — Pat ! I shall *kill* you if you are possessed by a feeling of deadly ennui ! ”

Pat laughed ; a ringing, self-confident laugh.

“ So you may. You have my full permission. *My* honeymoon is going to last all my life, and feel too short when I get to the end. As to this preliminary

Anticipations

canter, darling, we'll have all the fun we can out of our fifty pounds, and I leave it entirely to you to settle how it's to be spent. We'll be reckless and extravagant, and blow it in a week, or we'll be careful and provident, and eke it out for a month ; but when it's finished, back we come. We can't afford to spend any more just now. I fancy you and I can contrive to get a fair amount of happiness out of fifty pounds, and 'our own resources.' Eh, little bride ? '

"Oh, Pat !" cried Gwen sighing.
"Isn't it a *heavenly* world ? "

CHAPTER II

THE LOST NOTES

PAT and Gwen Hilbert had been married for exactly two hours and three-quarters. Their heads were thrust out of the window of a first-class railway compartment, the window of which bore a label reserving it for their exclusive use. They were occupied in waving adieu to the best man, and in regarding with benign patronage the scurrying masses of miserable, ordinary people on the platform, who were *not* starting off on a honeymoon.

“Excursion or something!” volunteered the best man vaguely. “You’re all right, anyway. Boxes in the second van at the back. Ta-ta! Bless you, my children. Bear up!”

Pat showed his straight, white teeth in the most beaming of smiles; Gwen screwed up her little nose in a saucy grimace; the sun shone full on their faces, and showed them so young, so handsome,

The Lost Notes

so radiantly happy and content, that they seemed the habitants of a different world from the careworn figures on the platform. And so in good truth they were. Then, with a jolt and a roar, the train glided out of the station, and the honeymoon was begun. The newly married pair seated themselves, and smiled rapturously into each other's face.

“ At last ! We're off ! We've left them all behind. I've got you all to myself. Hurrah ! Mrs. Hilbert, I love you ! You're the very nicest married woman I've ever met. You looked adorable in church. I'm not sure that you don't look more adorable now. Is that a 'going-away gown' ? Will it be described in the papers ? Will it say, 'the bride wore a dress the colour of her eyes, with trimmings the colour of her hair, and jolly little lace fixings at the throat, and a long, curly feather that tickled her husband's cheek ' ? ”

Mrs. Hilbert laughed, and tossed the aforesaid feather in the air.

“ It *has* been exciting ! Such a lovely

A Honeymoon in Hiding

day, and such crowds in the church, and everyone so kind. I *have* enjoyed myself. I wish it were all coming over again. Did I really look nice? It was so aggravating being inside the veil and not able to see. Did you hear any remarks as we came out of church?"

"What sort of remarks?"

"Oh—h—about *me*! Nice remarks—people saying I looked pretty, or anything like that? I heard nothing but one great long 'Oh—h!' There was a man at the gate taking snapshots. I do *hope* we shall see them."

The bridegroom shivered.

"I pray we don't! Like his impudence. About fifty people told me that I was a lucky fellow, and every man in the church was blue with envy, but I was too much taken up with you to listen to stray remarks. It's just as I said; Gwen Hilbert is a thousand times lovelier and dearer than Gwen Nugent. Take off your glove and show me your ring. I want to see how it looks."

Gwen complied with a smile, and then,

The Lost Notes

with sudden remembrance, held out her hand towards him.

“Look! The bracelet. Mrs. Maddison gave it to me at the reception. Brought it in her pocket, and slipped it on when she shook hands. Wasn’t it sweet of her? Isn’t it a pet?”

“Turquoise and diamonds. Very pretty indeed. What a pile of jewellery you have. That reminds me—I had a present too—a bank-note from Bremner. It arrived last night, and I put it in my pocket-book with the rest. Something more to add to our honeymoon fund, darling! I’ll hand it over to you to spend in some of your beloved old furniture shops. There are always lots of them about in holiday places. You shall go and buy something the first wet day, when you want something to do.”

“Pat, you darling! May I really? How lovely of you! I’m simply longing for a bureau; a really old one, to put in the Den. . . . What’s the matter?”

“Er, nothing. I am just—I thought I put—” Pat frowned slightly as he

A Honeymoon in Hiding

thrust his hand into one pocket after another, and brought it out empty. He rose from his seat and stood stretched to his full height, a tall, supple figure divining that impatient hand now here, now there, a second, a third time into the same pockets, while the frown deepened on his brow. “Where *can* it be?”

Gwen smiled with easy reassurance. “Poor boy, what piles of pockets! It must be dreadfully confusing to be a man. Let *me* feel. . . No! it certainly isn’t there. You must have put it in your bag.”

“I never——” began Pat emphatically, then checked himself, and turned to lift his crocodile handbag from the rail. His face had grown perceptibly paler, it grew paler still when a few moments’ hurried turning over of contents revealed no signs of the missing book. “No; it’s not here. *Gwen!* It can’t be—I can’t possibly have lost——”

“No, no, dear. Don’t get flustered. Think! When did you have it last? Have you paid anything this morning?”

“I gave Masters five pounds for our

The Lost Notes

fares and small expenses. Here's the change." He thrust his hand into a trouser pocket and drew out a promiscuous jumble of coins. "I had it this morning. I put Bremner's note besides the others—two twenty-fives. I remember distinctly putting it in my pocket. *By Jove!*" He sat down on the seat with a sudden thud, as if a devastating remembrance had robbed his muscles of their power. "I remember now. . . . A man knocked against me in the crowd—I thought it was an accident—a seedy-looking fellow with a hatchet face; a pickpocket, no doubt. He apologised and cut out of sight. He's got it, Gwen! For a ducat he's got it. He spotted us, no doubt, and guessed I should be worth plundering. It's gone! Our fifty pounds—the money for our honeymoon."

"Wait a minute, darling; wait a minute! Don't take the worst for granted. Is there nowhere else you can look? No other pocket; no other bag? You are *sure* you didn't give it to anyone to keep? People are not always *quite* responsible

A Honeymoon in Hiding

on their wedding morning—I did the silliest things. . . . No? But then, even at the worst, dear, didn't you take the numbers of the notes?"

Pat started; a light flashed in his eyes, then hopelessly flickered out, while the red stained his cheek.

"Er—yes, of course. I always do. But, you see, the dickens of it is, as a matter of fact, I wrote them *in* the pocket-book itself."

"I see," said Gwen demurely. She pressed her lips together, but the corners twitched, and the next moment she burst into a peal of laughter.

"So much for your methodical business habits! Oh, Pat, you unfortunate creature, what a handle you *have* given me! Never again will you dare to accuse *me* of carelessness. And you have not the least idea what the numbers were, or any way of finding out? No, of course not; you've paid out such lots of money lately, poor dear, haven't you? Don't look so miserable, dear. If it's gone, it's gone, and it's no use grizzling."

The Lost Notes

"How can I help it? Think what it means. I could kill myself. It's enough to make anyone miserable. How you *can* laugh!"

"Of course I can laugh! It's my wedding day, and I couldn't be miserable for fifty times fifty pounds. If *you* can, I'm very much annoyed. What's fifty pounds when you've got a wife?"

"Darling!" There was a rueful note in Pat's voice. "It's just because of the wife that I want it so badly. I couldn't have a honeymoon without a wife, but now it looks precious like having the wife without a honeymoon. If the money has gone—the money that we put aside—what are we to do? Of course, I could wire to the bank for more, but——"

Gwen shook her head.

"No, certainly not! We made up our minds that we must not draw any more. Whatever we do, we must not begin our married life by being reckless and improvident. You've spent far more money than you expected on furnishings. That's my fault, but I don't repent. When you

A Honeymoon in Hiding

mean to live with things all your life, they ought to be good and congenial, and those dear old tables and cabinets are going to be real friends to me; but I won't let you make any more holes into your poor little capital. You shan't draw another penny piece."

"But our honeymoon! Can you bear to give it up? We shan't have any honeymoon."

Gwen tossed her head, the light of battle shining in her eyes.

"I'm *going* to have it. It's my very own honeymoon, and nothing in the world shall take it from me. Nothing *can*, so long as you love me, and are kind. We haven't as much money as we expected—very well, then! we'll have to change our plans. We'll use our wits and think of something we can do which will cost a quarter as much, and be four times as nice. That's easy. Everything is easy when you are just married to the very nicest person in the whole big world. Kiss me and smile, and don't dare to look grumpy, or I shall think you have

The Lost Notes

married me for my fortune: fifty pounds a year, and a grand piano, and fifteen silver bonbon dishes. That's better! Now you look more like yourself. . . Let's turn out our pockets and see how much worldly pelf we still own between us."

Gwen took a tiny purse from her pocket as she spoke, and rained the contents on her lap. Pat dived into his trouser pockets and added his quota to the store; dived again and produced two sovereigns and two first-class return tickets to B——; which being done, Gwen proceeded to add up the combined amount.

"Three, five, six; six sovereigns in gold, one in silver, that's seven. Seven pounds—four shillings—and eightpence. How much can we honeymoon for seven pounds four shillings and eightpence? How much does it cost to live in an hotel?"

"Getting on to a pound a day per head; in the swagger ones, that's to say, like the one for which we're bound to-day. The cheaper ones will do you for ten and six. Even so, with the extras that always crop

A Honeymoon in Hiding

up, we could only last out for three or four days. It's hopeless to think of it. It's the most confounded hard luck I ever heard!"

"Dear boy, it might be worse. Millions of people have honeymoons on less than that, and manage to be happy and comfortable."

"I suppose they do; for a couple of days at Margate or Southend, and then make straight for home. I don't care a hang about other people. I'm thinking of ourselves. What in the world shall we do?"

"Wait!" cried Gwen breathlessly, "Wait."

She sat bolt upright in her seat, her lips pressed together, her eyes wide and intent. One saw at a glance that something had been said that had brought with it an inspiration, which she was engaged in turning over in her fertile brain. Her husband watched her, his face full of tender regret. His little wife, who was beginning her trials and disappointments so early! Seven pounds for a honeymoon —Great Cæsar's ghost!

The Lost Notes

“Pat!” cried Gwen breathlessly.
“Why shouldn’t *we* ‘make for home,’ instead of a big, formal hotel?”

Her face shone with happy anticipation, but so far from being infected by her enthusiasm, her bridegroom’s voice rang with horrified reproach.

“Gwen! Go back? To town? Back to the fuss and the bustle, and the whole crowd of relations flocking round us, questioning, advising, interfering—how *can* you? It would be hateful!”

“It would indeed. I quite agree. You don’t understand what I mean. Listen now, and don’t interrupt. You won’t agree at first: men are such conventional dears; but if you think it over, you will see its points. . . . What do we want most of all? To be alone together, far from the madding crowd. I’ve always been so thankful I wasn’t born a grandee who was fated to go off for a honeymoon accompanied by a maid and a valet, to stay at a mansion ‘kindly lent for the occasion,’ crammed with other menials, all employed in staring and taking notes.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

Even in an hotel there are the waiters. How could we have cosy little meals with waiters standing behind our chairs, and handing dishes with a basilisk calm, while you ask me if I take pepper, or I ask you how many pieces of sugar—and we blush, and upset our wine? The couples who are quite alone have the best of it. . . . Pat! it's impossible to pay board and lodging out of seven pounds; let's cut the lodgings and go home. Listen! Listen! This is what I suggest." She drew nearer to him, fixing him with her eyes, holding upward a dramatic hand. "To-morrow morning we hie back to town, carrying the simplest things we possess, packed in two handbags—leave our heavy luggage in the left-luggage office—take a cab to the corner of the road, and steal s—oftly into our own house by the back door! That back door is going to be our salvation. How thankful we ought to be that we have not only an 'airey' like so many town houses! There's nothing down that lane but other back doors, and the doctor's stable. It will be easy to run the blockade,

The Lost Notes

and once inside the rest is easy. You said yourself that the house looked wonderfully in order. All the absolute needfuls are there, and the rest we can do without. And there we'll be, and there we'll stay, a pair of Babes in the Wood, lying *perdu* in their own house, while all the world supposes them to be miles away ; and there'll be no one to stare, and no one to quiz ; and I'll cook your little meals, and you'll brush my little boots, and we'll play at love in a cottage ; and it will be just the loveliest, most amusing game that ever was played.— Well ? ”

Her husband smiled at her with fond admiration. It was a mad scheme, of course—quite, quite mad and impracticable, but there was no denying that it had its points. His expression brightened ; his voice held a lingering regret.

“ You romantic little schemer ! I don't care one rap where I am, so long as I am with you ; that's the one point that matters. But it's impracticable, dear. There are a dozen things. Fires,

A Honeymoon in Hiding

for instance. Couldn't have a fire, because the smoke would give you away. All very well to talk about meals, but how can you cook without fires? And neighbours? Neighbours would hear sounds, and give the alarm. And lights? The gas is not turned on. Can't get it turned on without giving away the show. We'd be run down in a day."

Gwen rolled her eyes to the hat rack in dramatic impatience.

"The denseness, the stupidity of men! They've no invention in them. We wouldn't have a fire, stupid! I can do all the cooking that's needed on the little oil stove I had in my den, and warm myself at it into the bargain. You'll have to turn up your coat collar and go out for oil, while I keep guard at the back door. In days to come, when you are Court Physician with a handle to your name, you'll love to think how you smuggled in that oil. You'll be prouder of it than of any of your honours. The neighbours will be too much engrossed with their own affairs to listen for odd noises; we

The Lost Notes

mustn't *make* odd noises, anyway. . . . Everybody is agreed that there is no light so pleasant and becoming as candles. So much for that. What's the next objection?"

"What could we *do*? Supposing, even, that all went right in the house, how would you propose to pass the time? The moment we stepped out of the door we should meet every single soul we knew, or had ever met before. There'd be a fatality in it. London may be the largest city in the world, but have you ever tried avoiding anyone in it? I have. You run bang into him at the next corner."

"In the West End! Yes, just so. But we'd avoid the West End, and spend our time in the London that's as far away from Hyde Park as John o' Groats' House, or a good deal farther. We'd get into a taxi at the corner, and whirl out of the danger zone, and then—then we'd be in a new land, among new people, and see all sorts of interesting places and things that no born Londoner knows out of a guide-book. We'd go to theatres where

A Honeymoon in Hiding

the stalls cost a shilling, and dine in fascinating restaurants for eighteenpence a head, including wine; or if we were tired we'd taxi back with an armful of plunder, and spend a cosy evening in our rooms. Don't make any more objections, Pat, if you love me. I'm so in love with the idea. I—I really am beginning to be *glad* you lost that money. It's going to be the most original honeymoon that was ever spent."

"A honeymoon in hiding!" said Pat softly. He made no further objection, but took his wife's hand in his, and held it firm and close. "I—I don't believe there's another girl in the world who would have been such a brick. Arrange it as you like, darling. I don't care . . . So long as I'm with you. . . ."

CHAPTER III

THE HOME-COMING

THE honeymooners had been two days established in their own house. They had flown back to town winged with horror at the surprising inroads made in their small capital by twenty-four hours' sojourn in a fashionable hotel, and had succeeded in raiding their lawful dwelling with unexpected, almost disappointing, ease. A taxi conveyed them to the corner of the street, where they had divided company, Pat making boldly for the front door, prepared with an explanation of his mission, if by chance he were intercepted *en route*, while Gwen waited trembling at the corner, attired in an inconspicuous blue serge costume, with a motor-veil swathed closely round her head. Each carried a tightly packed handbag, supplemented, in the bride's case, by a basket of provisions, while the bridegroom's pockets bulged wide, and beneath the

A Honeymoon in Hiding

flap of his coat lurked a quart bottle filled with paraffin oil. He felt as if every eye in London were focused upon him as he ascended the steps of his own house and turned the key in the lock, but in reality no single person troubled to cast a glance. The opposite neighbours had their windows tightly swathed in Nottingham lace, and took far more interest in the Fiji Mission than in the inhabitants of the surrounding houses. The old maid to the left was confined to bed with a cold ; the large family to the right were engaged in their own pursuits ; the policeman was pacing the extreme end of his beat ; the pedestrians saw no cause for suspicion in the innocent spectacle of a young man opening a door by means of a latchkey. Pat dropped his impedimenta on the nearest table, and hurried down the passage to find the key of the back door, and give admittance to his waiting spouse.

“ Welcome home, Mrs. Hilbert. By the back door ! ” he whispered gaily, and master and mistress danced an impromptu gavotte along the oilclothed passage.

The Home-Coming

“ Home, home, sweet, sweet home !
Mustn’t all the dear little chairs and
tables be pleased to see us ? ”

Under Gwen’s able management the empty shell of a house soon attained an air of comfort, so far at least as two rooms were concerned. The spare bedroom, in which various boxes had been locked away, could still remain locked by day, hiding all sign of occupation ; and by way of sitting-room, choice fell upon a small apartment on the second floor which had been destined to be used as a general writing and work room, for the use of both husband and wife. Two considerations prompted this choice ; in the first place, the room was situated on the second floor, whereby a few minutes’ grace would be vouchsafed to its occupants if the officious relations carried out their threat of paying a surprise visit to the house ; while the second, and almost more important reason lay in the fact that one entire end of the room was filled in by a fixture cupboard, which would offer a convenient hiding-place from an attacking force.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

A former tenant had erected this cupboard. May his tribe increase! It was divided into three partitions, the centre, filled with deep, capacious shelves, the two side spaces left open, and surrounded with hooks. Gwen's quick eye at once grasped the strategic possibilities of this retreat, and on the first exciting sortie into the wilds of London, insisted upon buying a couple of strong bolts, the which Pat fitted up *inside* the two cupboard doors, completing his labour by boring various spy and ventilation holes in inconspicuous portions of the panels.

A hiding-place for themselves having now been secured, the couple next applied themselves to solving the problem of "cutting their traces," and to this end Gwen instituted what she was pleased to call a "fire drill," in which each was apportioned special tasks, and trained to perform them in the quickest possible method. In the middle of a cosy little meal she would suddenly throw up her hand, hiss the word "Fire!" in a stage whisper, when *presto!* the machinery would

The Home-Coming

be set in action. Pat would dart noiselessly at the oil stove—kindest and most unobtrusive of friends—extinguish it with a turn, and lift it bodily into the ~~bottom~~ of the centre cupboard. Next, the tray with all its contents would find a place on a shelf above, the key would be turned in the lock, and pipe and tobacco rescued from their latest hiding-places. In the meanwhile Gwen would deftly range the chairs against the wall, nip off the tablecloths, smooth the cover of the sofa, and gather up the bundle of fancy-work which, like the pipe, was invariably to be found in a new position. These sweeping movements effected, the conspirators would promptly dive into their respective corners, bolt themselves in, and gasp with relief. It was astonishing how quickly the transformation could be accomplished. After two or three of these drillings the cosy, inhabited little den could be reduced to an empty shell in something under a minute and a half, and surely, surely even if by bad luck the invaders made straight for this room

A Honeymoon in Hiding

of all others, it would take longer than that to open and shut the front and vestibule doors, traverse the hall, and mount the first flight of stairs!

With regard to meals, interrupted or peaceful, two days' experience had proved the infinite superiority of a picnic over the solemn formality of hotel repasts. The principal repasts of the day were partaken in one or other of those delightfully economical Italian restaurants which abound in fashionable London, while the preparation of the home meals was largely aided by such modern conveniences as coffee-machines and egg-boilers, which with other of the less valuable wedding presents, had been stowed away in boxes in the spare room. As for the bacon for the morning repast, it could be procured at any large store, and carried home in a greasy paper: wafer shreds of bacon, sliced by a wondrous machine, the which tasted as never bacon had tasted before, served hot from the frying-pan on the top of the little stove, right on to the plate itself. Breakfast under such conditions

The Home-Coming

was a feast for the gods. Afternoon tea, if needed, was equally easy to accomplish, while before the return home, the handy heat-retaining flask could be filled with soup, and a cup of bouillon be in readiness if perchance the pangs of hunger made themselves felt during the evening.

So far the honeymooners felt assured that their presence had remained absolutely unsuspected. There was little traffic in the narrow passage on which the back door debouched, and, given the preliminary precaution of listening, and peering through the cracks of the door, one could be practically sure of successfully running the blockade. Gwen had artfully placed some article of furniture before the respective windows of the rooms in occupation, so that there was no danger that either she or her husband would show themselves at the windows in a moment of forgetfulness. No smoke emerged from the chimney, no noise was permitted which could penetrate the dividing walls.

For the first few days Pat hardly dared to talk above a whisper, or Gwen to tread

A Honeymoon in Hiding

otherwise than on the tips of her little slippers, but nothing grows more rapidly than a sense of security, and after three or four days of peaceful retreat, a general slackening of caution was observable in the camp. Pat whistled, and chanted snatches of un-classical ditties, as he performed his toilet. Gwen's laugh rang out in its old, clear trill. Nobody thought about them; nobody cared. The best hiding-place in the world was in the heart of the great city.

According to prearranged plan, the happy hunting grounds of the honeymooners were those far-off districts which exist but as names to the dwellers in Mayfair; and among these the "East End" soon took a foremost place. The crowded, cosmopolitan East End, with its booths, its fairs, its markets, its slums, its palaces, its winding lanes, so strangely un-English in aspect; the great thoroughfare with its towering hospital, cutting a broad line from east to west. It was an unknown world, a world full of grim struggle and suffering; full also of kindli-

The Home-Coming

ness, courage, and a delightful leavening of humour. The songs of the East End! —who has heard them in their native element without delight? The barrel-organs make their refrains familiar in more rarefied circles, but it is not until their words have been heard chanted by a chorus of factory hands that their full flavour can be appreciated. From a moral standpoint they are far superior to those in favour farther west; virtue is indeed rampant in many of the refrains, and the unvarying themes run in copy-book fashion on such old-fashioned virtues as love, courage, and filial affection.

It was Gwen's enjoyment in these musical effusions which prompted her to make a suggestion to her husband as they sat over dinner one evening in a little Italian restaurant not a hundred miles from Holborn, consuming some of the best-cooked food which can be procured in London, accompanied by a blue-red wine which was almost as strikingly bad.

"Pat," she cried suddenly, "I want to go to a theatre—an East-End theatre!"

A Honeymoon in Hiding

Something thrilling and exciting. Does one book seats for East-End theatres? Could we book here? Would they be advertised in the papers? ”

Gwen usually asked a dozen questions where another would be content with one. Her mind was so quick that it had a habit of flying ahead without waiting for a reply, so that Pat, being naturally slow, found that his only safe course was to seize on the leading idea, and stick to it like a limpet, regardless of side issues.

“ Theatre! ” he responded obediently. “ Certainly. Capital idea. I haven’t a particularly extensive acquaintance with East-End theatres, but I believe they are nothing if not thrilling. They don’t advertise in the *Morning Post*; but I’ll ask the waiter; he is sure to be able to give us some sort of list. Roaring melodrama would be about your fancy, I suppose? ”

But Gwen shook her head. Not melodrama, she explained, because they fired off pistols, and she always shrieked, and felt so silly. Drawing-room comedy was her passion, and when a thin and blurred

The Home-Coming

sheet was produced, she chuckled with delight at sight of the titles of the two leading plays at the moment holding the favour of eastern London. *Cissy, or Love's Devotion*, promised an intellectual treat, but its attractions paled beside the allurements of *The Worst Girl of the Family*.

“Oh, oh ! I've such a fellow-feeling for her. I've played the part myself for twenty-four years. Pat, I can't bear my life a moment longer, if you don't take me to see the *Worst Girl*. Don't let's waste a moment. Nothing else could possibly be so nice.

But, after all, the *Worst Girl* was postponed until another night, for the waiter, witnessing Gwen's excitement, came forward with a thrilling suggestion. Perhaps the lady would like to see a competition at a music-hall ? There was one announced for to-night at the “National East End.” He could declare from past experience that it was the “most amusing, and”—with a shrug of the shoulders—“amiable also ; of a good intent.” The proprietor of the Hall had the white heart, and the

A Honeymoon in Hiding

competitions were arranged for the benefit of the young girls of the factories, in whose circumstances madame could believe that a five-pound note would represent a fortune. It was to gain a five-pound note that to-night's competition would be held.

“ Factory girls — five-pound note — a competition ! What *sort* of competition ? What do they do ? ” queried Gwen breathlessly, whereat the waiter's tired face lit up with a flash of amusement.

“ Madame understands that there appears at this hall a *prima donna*, a star, a very fine madame indeed, who has even had a turn at the ‘ Empire ’ itself. It is to personate her—to sing her songs, make her dance, her gestures, her smiles. In the first part of the programme madame herself would appear ; in the second, the young girls would compete. One after the other they would appear on the stage, dressed, madame would understand, in their toilet of every day, and would sing a song chosen from the star’s *répertoire*. It was a sight the most unusual, the most

The Home-Coming

unique, only to be equalled by that of the presentation of the five-pound note to the successful candidate of the evening." The best seats were a shilling each.

The honeymooners looked at each other and drew long breaths of delight. The *Worst Girl* must wait; *Cissy* must wait. In the bosom of the family, surrounded by love's devotion, they must bide their turn, for it was now or never with the factory girls and their impersonations of the beautiful star.

Half an hour later Pat and Gwen were seating themselves in one of the front rows of "stalls" at the "National East End," and inwardly marvelling to find that on the whole it looked so much like the places of amusement with which they were familiar. Cheap gilding instead of dear; cotton-backed satin instead of silk; at a first glance there seemed little difference between the two, and the building had fine proportions, and was brilliant with lights. It is true that the occupants of the stalls differed widely from the crush-hatted, satin-cloaked audience of the

A Honeymoon in Hiding

West, but they had an air of quite unexpected respectability, and were every whit as detached and uninterested in manner.

The galleries were thronged with an eager crowd whom the honeymooners divined to be ultimately connected with the business of the hour, and when the star made her first appearance her ditties were received with breathless attention.

The star was large and coy. She wore a chestnut wig, a white satin dress, and large clusters of imitation diamonds. Her voice could not, by any stretch of courtesy, be called sweet ; it was in quality rather of the nature of an engine whistle. She enunciated her words with a piercing distinctness, putting her finger in her mouth when a youthful effect was desired ; dancing a heavy breakdown between the verses, and on those occasions when she wished to be especially naïve, burrowing her chin into her neck, when the double chin promptly became three, and spread right over the diamond stars.

Gwen looked on with rapt attention,

The Home-Coming

putting herself mentally in the place of the factory girls, and unconsciously imitating each grimace in a fashion which reduced her husband to silent convulsions of laughter. The rest of the programme was dull beyond relief ; but to-night no one had any attention to spare for performing dogs or human acrobats ; all the applause was kept in store to greet the manager when, at long last, he appeared on the boards to introduce the first of the fifteen heroines of the night.

The manager was stout, and wore a frock coat, well creased at the waist. He wore also an enormous solitaire diamond in his necktie, and another on the little finger of his left hand. His features were Hebraic in type, and beaming with good nature.

“Ladies and gents,” he announced genially, “I have much pleasure in introducing to your notice Candidate No. 1, Miss Louiser Riggs, who will now proceed to inform you that ‘She’s no lady, dressed in fine array!’ ”

Loud applause.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

Striding round the corner of the wings came a big, thickset girl, with a mop of red hair, a picture hat ornamented with white plumes, a collarless blouse, a blue skirt with a ragged hem, and a pair of ancient boots, through the toes of which could be discerned fleeting glimpses of white stocking. "Good old Louiser!" shouted the gallery, and Louisa bowed her acknowledgments with much self-possession. Then she patted her tattered skirt, glanced over her shoulder at an imaginary train, pressed her hands against her waist with a smoothing, patting movement, and rolled her eyes languidly from side to side. It was an admirable piece of mimicry, and the house yelled approval; but, alas! Louisa's voice was thin and husky, and her manner of enforcing her modest virtues was far from convincing. Friends of the rival candidates "booed" in derisive fashion, and Louisa artfully hurried through her verses and lengthened the interludes between, when her dancing steps, her smiles and flutters would surely score to her credit. Never-

The Home-Coming

theless, the verdict of the house was not appreciative, and it was with a discomfited air that she returned to the back of the stage, to seat herself in the first of the fifteen chairs which had been ranged in readiness against the wall.

“Ladies and gents,” announced the manager, smiling more broadly than ever, “Miss 'Arriet Tevans will now oblige with her valuable advice :

“ ‘Put yer umberella back,
With yer troubles in the rack,
And the sun will sh—ine again ! ’ ”

'Arriet Tevans had evidently a large following, for she was greeted with cries of “Buck up, 'Arriet ! ” which advice was badly needed, for she looked as frightened as a rabbit, and just about as white and pink-eyed, and shivery about the nose, as she stood in the fierce glare of the footlights, panting visibly beneath her poor little bodice, and holding on tightly to the ends of her red shoulder shawl. There was nothing even faintly

A Honeymoon in Hiding

reminiscent of the star in her meek and frightened mien, but when at last she found courage to open her mouth, a surprising volume of sound startled the audience into attention. The very rafters seemed to ring as 'Arriet Tevans adjured her hearers to optimistic views, and two occupants of the stalls, at least, resisted with difficulty the temptation to thrust their fingers into their ears. Again the verdict of the audience was distinctly non-committal, and candidate number two retired with an air even more discouraged than that of her predecessor.

Gwen began to feel that the competition was not quite so amusing as she had imagined. There was too much grim earnest behind the surface comicality. What a dream of fortune that five pounds must appear to these daughters of toil, with their ragged skirts, and their broken boots; what a fabulous dream to the friends at home, tremblingly awaiting a verdict which spelt poverty or wealth. How heartrending must be the conviction that one had tried, and failed. Gwen

The Home-Coming

did not feel much inclined to laugh at the eccentricities of the next few candidates who demonstrated in striking fashion the rareness of allied gifts. If a girl possessed any powers of mimicry she had no voice ; if she had a voice, she could not mimic ; but Elizabeth Huggins, number nine on the programme, seemed at last to be able to combine both rôles. She was a pretty girl, or would have been pretty, if it had not been for her pitiful air of delicacy. She wore no hat, and her dress of rusty black cashmere had plainly been made for someone several sizes bigger than herself. She was shaking with nervousness, but there was a desperate air of determination in the manner in which she walked forward to the centre of the stage, and made her bow to the audience. "She can't face it ! She'll bolt in another minute," whispered Pat in Gwen's ear ; but Elizabeth Huggins did not bolt. She dropped her eyelids as if to shut out the sight of the white blur of faces, and with a spasmodic jerk of the body set herself to her task. First, with a downward,

A Honeymoon in Hiding

crouching movement she appeared to sink into herself, shortening her neck, and inflating her chest into an appearance of fullness ; this done, the white shoulder shawl was twitched downward to mark the line of a *décolleté* bodice, above which was now revealed to sight a mass of glittering glass beads, scarcely less effective than the star's own, in the kindly glare of the footlights. The sight of those "diamonds" awoke a preliminary cheer from the gallery, and, encouraged thereby, Elizabeth dived into a capacious pocket, whence a sheet of music was produced and held out in extended arms, while a sweeping smile stretched the corners of the mouth. This was good ; this was true. The picture of the star at the same moment in her performance rose instinctively in the mind of the beholder, and the audience broke into renewed cheers. Then Elizabeth began to sing, and there was an instant hush. It was a small voice, a weak voice, but exquisitely true and sweet, and the banal words took to themselves quite a touch-

The Home-Coming

ing beauty as the young voice trilled them out :

“ I don’t care where I reside,
I’ll be quite satisfied,
Any old place will do for me,
So long as you are trew ! ”

When the verse was ended the applause broke out once more and a faint flush showed itself on Elizabeth’s cheeks. Still with downcast eyes, as if not trusting herself to face the audience, she made a sweeping bow of acknowledgment, and lifting her skirt in two outstretched hands began a series of posturing strides which represented the star’s dance. It was cleverly done, and Pat laughed heartily at the sight, all the more heartily, perhaps, because the uplifted skirt revealed a patched and tattered woollen petticoat, instead of the star’s cascade of lace, and boots and stockings in the last stage of decrepitude ; but when he turned towards Gwen, lo, her lips were set, and two big tears shone in her eyes. No ! she was telling herself, it was not funny at all—it was pitiful, heartrending to

A Honeymoon in Hiding

behold. The desperate resolution of this white, frightened girl conjured up dread pictures. Who waited at home for the coming of that five-pound note? *What* was that home?—a cellar; an attic, damp and bare, with perhaps a few tumbled coverings in one corner to serve as bed for some dear one, starving, suffering? “Ah, she must get it. She *must* have the prize!” sighed Gwen earnestly to herself.

And then suddenly came a hitch. Elizabeth’s thin cheeks flushed with a painful red, her eyes showed a frightened gleam, the clear notes choked, struggled on, choked again, and were finally overcome by a paroxysm of coughing. It was not ordinary coughing which might pass with the passing of a moment; there was a tragic significance in its sound, and the girl seemed at once to realise her defeat. Her thin arms dropped to her sides, her head dropped on her chest, she turned and walked hurriedly off the stage.

“Ladies and gents,” announced the manager hastily, “Miss Florence Murphy will now oblige.”

The Home-Coming

Gwen drew close to her bridegroom's side and clutched a piece of his coat. "Pat, oh, Pat ! She wanted it so badly —she was so brave. I can't *bear* it if she doesn't win the prize."

Pat squeezed her fingers, and whispered reassuringly, "She was far the best, dear, far the best. She's bound to win." But in his heart he was not so sure.

Ten minutes later Elizabeth Huggins slipped into her vacant seat, to listen to the efforts of her remaining rivals, and as Fate would have it, arrived just in time to witness the triumph of the evening. Alice Maud Smith was the name of the diva, and from the moment that she appeared on the stage her mastery seemed assured. She had no beauty, no voice, and not too much ear, but she had unlimited self-possession, a merry eye, and that happy knack of noting and reproducing leading characteristics which makes the fortune at once of the portrait painter and the entertainer. No subtle effects for her ; no half shades, nor delicate suggestions. Alice Maud knew her audience,

A Honeymoon in Hiding

and, so to speak, piled on her colour with a shovel. She shouted her words in a loud, rollicking treble ; at the end of each verse she dropped her head forward with a sharp little jerk, blowing out the lower part of her cheeks, in ludicrous exaggeration of the star's chin. At the end of each "dance" she brought down the heel of the right shoe with a deafening thud on the stage, and rolled her eyes so far upward that the iris completely disappeared from view. By means of such crude and exaggerated effects she excited her audience to a frenzy of admiration, and settled the question of the prize beyond a shadow of a doubt. The ten girls sitting ranged on their chairs at the back of the stage smiled sickly smiles, and clapped with the rest ; but Elizabeth Huggins's face shone out white and tense against the red screen.

"I've a sort of Yorkshire relish
For my little Yorkshire girl!"

Alice Maud smirked her thanks to a roaring, stamping audience, and five

The Home-Coming

minutes later was the proud recipient of the coveted five-pound note. The prize was presented with due honours, and during the ceremony Gwen was busy fumbling in her pocket; fumbling with a purse and the envelope of an old letter. Something small and yellow was transferred from one to the other, and a few words scribbled in pencil on the cover.

“Find someone at once, and send this round to Elizabeth Huggins,” were Mrs. Hilbert’s commands, and her husband sped willingly on his mission.

The honeymoon couple walked homeward arm in arm. From time to time they chanted snatches of songs beneath their breath, emphasising the points with tender glances beneath the light of the lamps.

“She’s my wife, and she suits me grand.”

“I don’t care where I reside,
So long as *You’re* there, I am satisfied.”

And the grim eastern street was an enchanted land.

CHAPTER IV

“AS OTHERS SEE US!”

THE fifth day was wet; hopelessly, drenchingly wet. Until this point the weather had behaved itself in exemplary fashion, so that, as Gwen philosophically observed, there was no justification for grumbling. “Still, let’s do it all the same,” she added, “and then it will be all the more exemplary to stay indoors and be happy. What’s your idea of amusing yourself on a long, wet day?”

Pat didn’t know. There was but one thought which obtruded itself at the moment, and that he put promptly into speech.

“What about meals?”

“It will clear in the afternoon. It always does. We’ll dine out and go on to see *Cissy*. Lunch will be a make-up festival at home, and I’ll be cook. What do you say to ham and eggs, and a cup of coffee to follow?”

“As Ithers See Us!”

Pat thought the *menu* somewhat sketchy, but was too newly married to say so. “Sounds savoury,” he said instead, and as Gwen construed the words into compliment, all was peace and joy.

She was certainly the most resourceful and amusing of companions, and the long, wet morning seemed to pass in a continuous ripple of laughter. Her suggestions for occupation were always quaint, and unlike anybody else’s suggestions.

“Pat,” she cried suddenly. “Let’s play at making faces like they do in books.”

Pat’s stare of amazement was absolutely unfeigned.

“What *do* you mean?”

“Oh, you know. The sort of thing they are always saying in *feuilletons*. ‘Fifteen contending emotions struggled for mastery on her lovely face.’ Where’s that novel I was reading yesterday? Let’s open it at random and see what we find. . . . Here you are! ‘*Cecilia looked at him, half reproachful, half defiant, with a great love shining out of her tired eyes.*’

A Honeymoon in Hiding

Exercise one! Let's stand before the glass and try to look all that, at the same time. It will be good practice for our 'English stolidity of expression.' Come along."

She thrust her hand through Pat's arm, and drew him, laughing and protesting, before the dressing-table, with its long, swing mirror, and a happy mirror it should have been at that moment to have the privilege of reflecting two beings so young, so comely, so radiantly alive.

"'Tention! Eyes! The first exercise, the most difficult of all," quoth the happy bride, "is to look *tired*. Make your eyes look tired, Pat. Pretend you are weary, utterly weary and satiated with life, and roll them at me, and see how they look. Just as a start."

But Pat stubbornly refused to obey.

"Shan't! Impossible. Jolly well ashamed of myself if I *could*, with my honeymoon not half over. I'll look a world of love, if you like. I'll go up to the top of the class for that!"

"Stupid! What's the credit in that?

“As Ithers See Us!”

That's easy," cried the bride complacently. "Well, *I'll* try. There!" She opened her eyes extraordinarily wide, rolled them upward so as to show quite an alarming amount of white, and still more slowly rolled them back into their ordinary position. "How's that?"

Pat shuddered.

"Excuse me. It is *not* becoming. You look extremely *ill*. I don't think he would return her love very long if she favoured him with many such glances."

Gwen's reply to this criticism was a glance of disdain, unmixed with warmer sentiments; after which she again turned to the mirror and braced herself for a second attempt. This time an appearance of intense languor was attained by the simple process of slowly flicking the dark eyelashes up and down, but the difficult point was reached when she endeavoured to introduce the due mixture of love, reproach, and defiance. The effect was, to put it mildly, alarming to behold, and Pat covered his face with his hands, affecting to cower in dismay.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“ My good girl, you couldn’t look worse if you intended to poison me the next moment ! Where does the great love come in ? Looks to me a lot more like hatred, but anyway, I’m no good at reading compound glances. I’ve lived among simple, straightforward people, and my education’s been neglected.”

“ Oh, but this is really quite simple. If you read any *feuilleton* you will find a dozen more complicated on every page. Let’s try another. . . . Here you are : ‘ *Surprise, doubt, and agitation struggled for mastery on her countenance as she listened to this thrilling tale.* ’ That ought to be easy enough. Try ! ”

Instantly both pairs of eyebrows arched upward, while the lower lip dropped apart. “ Surprise ” was an unequivocal success, but when it came to “ doubt ” opinions were sharply divided. Gwen wrinkled her brows, and sucked in her lips ; Pat buried his chin in his necktie, and screwed up his eyes until they were almost hidden from sight ; after which each violently denounced the other’s methods.

“As Ithers See Us!”

“Not a bit good. Toothache, if you like, but not doubt!”

“You look as if you were in church, and pretending that you weren’t asleep. Mine was far better than that. Now then for ‘agitation.’ I shall gulp for that: people always gulp when they are agitated. And pant . . . That’s good! That’s *very* good! The trouble will be to do them all in succession. Complete exercise: Surprise — doubt — agitation — typified in succession, as I count, and wave my hand. ‘Tention. One, two, *three!*”

The frenzied grimaces which ensued ended in paroxysms of laughter, as the performers sank back on convenient chairs, and rocked helplessly to and fro.

“Oh! Oh! Your *face*.”

“Oh! Oh! Your *eyes*.” Gwen fanned herself feebly with her crumpled little handkerchief, as though quite exhausted by her dramatic efforts. “Dear me, what a mercy it is that one’s expressions are automatic; it seems horribly difficult to manufacture them to order. Let’s try another way. We’ll each choose a descrip-

A Honeymoon in Hiding

tion and illustrate it, and the other shall guess what it is. There's your book; here's mine. Choose what you like."

"What a baby you are!" Pat took out a cigarette paper and felt in his pouch for a fresh twist of tobacco. He thought he deserved a smoke by this time, and was more interested in watching the pretty picture made by his wife as she smiled and dimpled over her search, than in preparing problems for his own solution. Thus it happened that it was his ears, though as a rule much the less acute of the two, which caught the first sound of the alarm, the faint click from below as of a key turning in a lock. He threw up his arm in the prearranged warning, and in an instant his wife was on her feet, bending forward in an attitude of keenest attention.

Yes! It was all too true. The front door shut with a hollow, reverberating thud. There was a sound of footsteps, a sound of voices, of high, feminine voices in shrill debate. The danger which they had dreaded had become a fact. The

“As Ithers See Us!”

cousins were upon them. “*Fire!*” hissed Gwen. “*Fire!*” hissed Pat in reply; with one stride of his long legs he seemed to reach from one end of the room to the other; the stove disappeared from view in the recesses of the central cupboard, newspaper and pipes were clutched in one outstretched hand, a pair of slippers in another; Gwen’s deft fingers gathered together the four corners of the tablecloth, carrying its contents as in a bag. So well had the tasks been apportioned, that they seemed completed at one and the same moment, and there was a smack of harlequinade in the manner in which husband and wife simultaneously disappeared behind the long swing doors.

Swift as had been the transformation, however, it is doubtful if it would have been swift or silent enough if the intruders had come straight upstairs; but as Gwen had anticipated, they chose rather to give a preliminary survey to the ground-floor rooms, and it was more than five minutes later before they mounted to the door of the den.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“This is the room they are going to use as a snugger,” announced Flora’s voice. Flora was the eldest and least amiable of the cousins, and Gwen, applying her eye to an air-hole, espied beside her the figure of that nasty, horrid, affected Mabel Gifford who had made such a desperate set at poor, dear Pat two winters ago. How *dare* Flora bring Mabel Gifford to spy over Pat’s house—her house—before even the most intimate of friends had passed its threshold? If a glance could have killed, a glance focused to one deadly point through a hole pierced by a gimlet, then surely Mabel Gifford’s mortal career would have come to an abrupt conclusion at this moment. As it was, however, she swept forward into the room in serene unconsciousness, seated herself in Pat’s favourite arm-chair, and stared around with appraising eye.

“What an appalling wall-paper! How on earth could they choose such a thing for a room in which they intend to *live*!”

“Oh, but, my dear, what could you expect? Gwen has no taste. I never

“As Ithers See Us!”

knew anyone with less eye for colour. You can see that in her clothes.”

Gwen straightened herself suddenly ; the cupboard creaked as she moved, and a corresponding creak sounded from the companion panel at the other end. Her tingling anger received force from the conviction that it was Pat’s silent convulsions of laughter which had caused the creak ; Pat doubled up with amusement at such aspersions against one who prided herself upon being the most artistic of her sex.

Mabel Gifford smiled : a forbearing, sweetly magnanimous smile.

“Oh, well,” she said generously, “she looks quite nice sometimes. Quite nice, I’ve seen her look. In a blue serge in the morning, for instance. One can’t go far wrong in blue serge. Some people think her almost pretty.”

Again the cupboard creaked in two-fold, eloquent fashion, but Flora and Mabel babbled on complacently, unconscious of the gaze levelled upon them to right and to left.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“Has it ever struck you that she—I wouldn’t say so for the world, of course: I detest uncharitable remarks—but sometimes her colour is so *suspiciously* pink ! ”

It was apoplectic at that moment, and such flashes of blue light seemed to dart through those gimlet holes that one would have expected the speakers to have been consumed as by fire. Gwen felt that she could never again believe in telepathy as she beheld the unruffled calm of her uninvited guests.

Flora patted her hair, and assumed an expression of virtuous resolve.

“I would rather not say what I think. One must be loyal, you know, and she is my cousin. The engagement certainly was a surprise. Pat had been so continually at our house; I could not have believed that he was the sort of man to be taken by that dolly style.”

“No, indeed. I thought at one time, dear—I felt quite sure—you seemed to have so much in common—I *quite* expected—”

Flora simpered complacently.

“As Ithers See Us!”

“Oh, well, perhaps at one time. He was certainly very marked, but I soon saw that there was no real *depth* in his character. When Gwen came up from the country to pay us that visit, it was quite painful to see how frivolous he became. I felt then that it would never do, and showed him gently, but firmly——”

“I see. Quite natural, but seems almost a pity. If you could have been patient and given him another chance, you might have saved him so much. He is immature, of course, very immature; but he seemed to me to have possibilities, and you would have brought them all to light. It wasn’t altogether his fault. Her manners are so very——”

“Oh, she absolutely threw herself at his head. Everyone saw that. I shall always feel a terrible responsibility at having asked her up, but now that it is a *fait accompli*, I must do my best for them both. I told Gwen I would look after the house while they were away. This room feels close. I don’t think the house is healthy myself, and it’s ridiculously

A Honeymoon in Hiding

beyond their means, but they took no advice and settled it all themselves. I offered to go with them to buy their things. Pat would have liked it, I could see ; but she wouldn't let anyone have a say but herself. Come and look at the bedrooms. Plain papers, if you please, each one a different colour. Ridiculous to have plain papers in bedrooms."

"Just a look round. I mustn't be long. I promised mother——"

The footsteps mounted higher up the stairs, the high treble voices becoming less and less distinct. From the far side of the cupboard a subdued voice broke the silence.

"Ahem !" it said, with an encyclopædia of insinuation. "A-hem !" But Gwen was too angry to respond. Still, and straight, and crimson-cheeked she stood in her corner until ten minutes had passed by and the sound of the front door proved that the house was once more free from intruders. Then, the two doors swung open, and with simultaneous haste the husband and wife sprang forward into the room, wheeled round, and faced each

“As Ithers See Us!”

other defiantly. Pat's hair was ruffled, his lips twitched, his expression was a comical mixture of amusement, nervousness, and bravado ; Gwen was one quivering embodiment of wrath ; black-browed, crimson-cheeked, with flashing eyes and little clenched hands.

“Beast ! Cat ! *Cats* ! Hateful, interfering cats ! ”

“Singularly indiscreet young women ! ”

“Cats, I tell you ! *Cats* ! And it's hateful and horrid of you to be so calm. Coming here—poking here in My house, and making remarks. Wall-paper, indeed ! My taste, indeed ! Blue serge. I can look quite nice in blue serge ! Did you hear her ? Did you *hear* her say it ? ”

“Yes, dear. It was quite true. I've seen you do it ! ”

“*Don't* ! ” Gwen screamed at him, and stamped her foot, oblivious of possible listeners next door. “Don't be maddening ! Don't—don't try to propitiate me. I—I won't stand it ! I am ‘dolly’ ; my cheeks are pink ; sus—pi—ciously pink—”

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“Deliciously, dear. She meant deliciously.”

“I—I threw myself at your head.”

“Never mind if you did. I was waiting to catch you.”

Gwen screamed again, and sawed the air with her arms.

“I hate you. I do! You—you—you ‘immature’ pig!”

Suddenly the tears streamed, and Pat caught her in his arms, all tenderness and compunction.

“Precious, little, silly girl! Don’t cry. I won’t let you cry. Brides never cry on their honeymoon. I have ‘possibilities,’ you know. Buck up, and bring them to light. I’m ‘frivolous.’ It depends on you.”

Gwen sniffed, and wiped her eyes with an infinitesimal handkerchief. To a certain extent she allowed herself to be propitiated by her husband’s blandishments, but it was evident that a grievance still lingered. Dr. Hilbert was perfectly conscious of the nature of that grievance, and smilingly awaited the moment when it would be put into words.

“As Ithers See Us!”

“Did you ever—were you really—is it true that you were ever——”

“Marked? By all the gods of heathen mythology, Gwendoline, my wife, I was not. Whatever may be the attitude the most diametrically opposed to ‘marked,’ that attitude was mine. And she showed me ‘gently but firmly,’ did she? . . . That Scotch fellow was all out of it when he wanted to see himself as ither saw him. If I had the chance to-morrow of hearing how my best pals talked of me behind my back, I’d run like a hare!”

“All people are not like some people. I’d scorn to say a word against a human creature, however—however hatefully they treated me.”

Pat swallowed several times in silence, his screwed-up face eloquently expressive above his wife’s reclining head. Then he said tactfully:

“But you, of course, my darling, are unlike everyone else. I say! This has been a bit of a nerve-shaking experience. I need calming down. Let’s have some tea!”

CHAPTER V

A RAMBLE

SUNDAY! A Sunday in town is apt to be a somewhat dreary occasion to those who have no regular interests or pursuits, or who for any reason are temporarily debarred from the same.

Dr. Patrick Hilbert, standing with his hands in his pockets, staring through the shrouded windows of the den, on the first Sunday morning after his marriage, was conscious of an acute pang of regret at the remembrance of the lost fifty pounds. Ah! that this bright spring day had found himself and his bride in some peaceful country retreat, instead of being mewed up in a dull town house, unable to draw back the very curtains for fear of detection. He stifled a sigh, and turned towards his wife.

“ Gwen! Have you any plans for to-day? ”

“ We are going to church.”

A Ramble

"Are we? H'm."

"Pat! How can you? Of course we are. It's the first Sunday we have had together. We *should* be ungrateful if we didn't go and——"

"Right you are, little dear. So we will. Question is, where?"

"We shall have to think. There are lots of places I have wished to go to 'some day,' and they would all be interesting."

"Such as——?"

"Oh-h, the Oratory, and the City Temple, and the Guards' Chapel, and the Christian Science place in Baker Street, and Southwark Cathedral, and the headquarters of the Salvation Army, and——"

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" Pat fairly gasped with amazement. "Talk of 'fancy religions!' No one can accuse *you* of being a narrow-minded young woman. Do you propose to take them all at a dose, or to extend the programme over a couple of Sundays? I'm the meekest and most amenable of men, but I tell you plainly, I'm off. I've an idea of my own for once,

A Honeymoon in Hiding

and I'll back it to be the better of the two. The question is—given congenial society, as many rests as you like, and meals at due intervals—how many miles could you walk in a day?"

"H'm," Gwen meditated. "How many miles does one walk in an hour?"

"Say three. Three would be about your figure, I should think."

"Then I could manage twelve. Two hours in the morning, and two in the afternoon, with rests for lunch and tea. Could we have lunch and tea?"

"Certainly. I'll promise you that, and we'll keep well within the dozen miles. That's fine. I've a ripping little book upstairs, which gave me some fine country walks last year, a guide-book of rambles round London by field-path and hedge-row—so that one can practically walk the whole day without striking a high road. We'll get off early, train to the starting point, laze along through the fields, get lunch at one nice little pub, tea at another, and bring up about six o'clock at a country church, enjoy the service, and train

A Ramble

home to supper. How does that strike you for a programme ? ”

Gwen acclaimed the suggestion with her wonted enthusiasm, whereupon the guide-book was taken from Pat’s bureau, and its contents searched for the most attractive expedition. On almost every page the most alluring descriptions attracted the eye, as, for instance : “ The present ramble introduces the visitor to a variety of scenes. At one time, he saunters along a riverside ; at another, he wanders over a breezy common, or through quaint, half-forgotten villages ” ; or, again, “ The church dates from the fourteenth century ; note a stile on the left, cross it, and enter the park. Through four fields the right-hand hedge is followed, then cross a second stile, and continue by the side of the ornamental water. Now turn up the hill to the left, from the summit of which an extensive view, etc. etc. etc.”

With such careful directions as these to guide one’s footsteps—with, moreover, instructions as to the various hostels *en route*, and thoughtful information as to

A Honeymoon in Hiding

Sunday trains—no one need go astray, and it was a very bright and happy couple of ramblers who alighted at the quiet station of K—— on that sunny spring morning.

During the course of the next few hours the flowery language of the guide-book was abundantly verified; the trees appeared in their “leafy green,” the grass was “studded with gem-like flowers,” “feathered choristers warbled overhead,” and the swans “floated proudly over the surface of the still lake,” as duly therein advertised. There also appeared the “snug hostel” at the identical moment when the question of lunch had assumed paramount importance, and the honeymoon couple were shown into a dim, low room of the type well known to wanderers through rural England—oil-clothed floor, horse-hair furniture, portraits of Queen Victoria over the sideboard, and Edward VII. above the mantelpiece; windows shrouded with Nottingham lace curtains, and banked high with fuchsias and geraniums; atmosphere chill, and—“*What does it smell*

A Ramble

like?" queried the bride, wrinkling her little nose in eloquent disapproval.

"Musty!"

"Silly! Of course it's musty. There are lots of musties. What's it like—this particular 'must'?"

"Sure I can't say!"

Gwen sniffed again, inflating her nostrils in critical fashion.

"It's like old bound volumes of the *Sunday at Home*. We had rows of them at home in the schoolroom, and I know the smell by heart. It wafts me back to my youth, but we *did* have the windows open. Ring the bell, Pat, do. I'm ravenous."

A smiling landlady appeared at the summons of that bell, and the same discussion took place concerning the forthcoming meal which has taken place in English village inns since the Flood, and will in all probability continue until the last trump.

Visitors : "What can we have to eat?"

Landlady : "Anything, sir; anything you fancy."

"Any soup?"

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“No soup to-day, sir; no call for soup on Sundays.”

“Any fish?”

“No fish to-day, sir. Awkward place to buy fish. Only three times a week. But anything you wish in joints. What would the lady——”

Lady (promptly): “Roast chicken.”

Landlady (pauses, hesitates, then with brilliant amiability): “We *have* chickens, of course — fine chickens; plenty of chickens. I could kill one and cook it at once, if you wouldn’t mind waiting, say, an hour and an *narf*!”

The ramblers, explaining that they would seriously mind waiting any period over five minutes, resigned themselves stolidly to the meal of ages: Hot joint and vegetables (boiled potatoes and watery cabbage). Cold joint and salad (plain, undressed lettuce). Apple pie, with a pale and solid crust, and a jug of admirable yellow cream. Strong-smelling, strong-tasting cheese, and delicious bread and butter. Good home-brewed ale; coffee, well mixed with grounds.

A Ramble

Not a tempting *menu*, perhaps, but given youth and good appetite, worse meals than this can be eaten with relish. Pat and Gwen made a hearty meal, and continued on their way powerfully refreshed.

The afternoon ramble through peaceful and pretty country presented no unusual features; another hotel supplied tea (embellished with radishes and spring onions), and shortly after five o'clock the lovers arrived at the village where they proposed to attend evening service before repairing to a station two miles off to catch the nine o'clock train to town.

The spurt given by the refreshing cup of tea had sped them so rapidly on their way that they found themselves arrived at their destination a good hour sooner than they had intended, and the question arose how to occupy the superfluous time. According to regrettable English fashion the church was closed; it was a fine old pile of rough grey stone, and promised an interesting interior, so that the fact was the more to be regretted. The rectory

A Honeymoon in Hiding

was a stately mansion, approached by tall, iron gates and surrounded by beautiful and extensive grounds. The grounds were in apple-pie order; the house itself presented an air of sleek prosperity. Evidently, this was one of the "fat" livings, where, in return for spiritual services rendered to a handful of villagers, an incumbent received a stipend running well into four figures.

Dr. Patrick Hilbert had several scathing remarks to make on the good fortune of clerics as he peered through the gate at the velvety lawn, the massed borders of bulbs, the glimpse of glasshouses in the distance. Then, at Gwen's suggestion, they turned down a narrow lane which bent a circular course round the village.

"There might be a little place to let which would just suit us for a week-end cottage!" she suggested hopefully.

Somewhat to Pat's relief, no cottage, large or small, appeared to be vacant. It was a prosperous looking little village, and the gardening display was unusually attractive. Right at the end of the lane

A Ramble

stood a small, white house, a degree superior to a cottage, and surrounded by a thick, well-kept, laurel hedge. On the principle that that which is hidden is always more alluring than that which lies unconcealed, our honeymoon couple made strenuous efforts to peer through this encircling screen. Pat stood a-tip-toe, Gwen stooped low to find an open space about the roots; they paced the whole length of the fence, and made scathing remarks on the wooden gate, and, having denounced the selfishness of the owner in good round terms, were about to turn away, when a head rose suddenly above the level of the hedge, and a voice politely bade them enter.

It was a grey head, belonging to an old man clad in a long linen coat, and carrying a weeding spud in his hand. A basket piled high with weeds lay on the grass by his side, and he pointed to it with an air of pride.

“Not bad for an hour’s work. It’s hard to keep pace with the weeds on this soil. No, no. Charmed, I assure you;

A Honeymoon in Hiding

charmed. It's not often that I have the pleasure of showing visitors round my garden. I do all my own work, so it's only fair that I should have a little praise sometimes. Quite a little patch, but a fair amount of bloom. Do you know anything about bulbs ? ”

“ Not very much. We are both city bred. My wife and I trained down to K—— and have walked over by way of field-paths. We want to go to the evening service here, and are just putting in the time before the church opens. Awfully kind of you to show us round. Daffodils, aren't they ? Awfully keen on daffodils. So fresh and yellow,” protested Pat amiably, whereupon his host's lined face lit up with a smile.

“ Narcissi,” he corrected quietly. “ Yes ; they are an interesting class. I have several new varieties.” He looked from one to the other of his visitors with an inquiring gaze—then sighed with an amiable regret. These were not gardeners ; they were ignorant ordinary people who were “ fond of flowers ” ;

A Ramble

solitary specimens would not thrill them ; rare cuttings struggling into life among the saxifrages in the rockery would leave them cold and untouched ; the obvious facts, colour and fragrance, were all that they desired. It was a disappointment, but with a quick mental change he shifted his interest from his own flowers to his visitors themselves ; the tall, clever-looking man ; the pretty, bright-faced girl. His tired old eyes dwelt on their faces with a kindly curiosity, and brightened in understanding. As the three made the leisurely round of the garden he picked a few specimen blossoms from every bed, and when the short circuit was concluded and they sat down to rest beneath an arbour of green, he laid the little bunch gently in Gwen's lap.

“With my good wishes for a long life together, my dear. I think—am I not right ?—that you are quite new partners ?”

The lovers blushed. Gwen's lids drooped over the flowers.

“Thank you so much. Yes. It is our first Sunday.”

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“ Ah-h ! ” The old man’s voice was eloquent. “ That’s good ; that’s very good. I’ll tell you something that is better still.”

Gwen’s eyes were lifted at that, in quick, incredulous surprise.

“ What ? ”

“ To be old partners, trusted and tried, after a lifetime spent together. I’ve been married forty years, and my wife is my sweetheart still. That’s what you have to aim at, my dear—to be your husband’s sweetheart to the end. Don’t ask me how it’s done. I can’t tell you. That’s my wife’s secret. Perhaps even she couldn’t explain. It’s a quality more than an effort. A ‘way’ some women have with them. I should say, however, — I should diagnose ” — the tired eyes twinkled again—“ that you possessed your full share of the quality ! ”

He looked at the young husband, and Pat looked back at him : a deep, eloquent glance ; but he spoke no word.. Gwen’s heart chanted a little song to itself. “ Oh, how happy I am ! How happy I am ! ”

A Ramble

There was a moment's pause, then, being English and terribly afraid of being betrayed into sentiment in public, Pat made haste to change the subject.

"We tried to get into the church, but it was shut. It's a fine old building; I should like to see the interior. An old living, I suppose. A fat one, too, by the look of the vicarage. Quite an imposing-looking house and fine grounds. Parsons are lucky fellows to have such jolly places to live in. In almost every village their houses are the biggest and most attractive. Quite mansions, in some cases."

"That is so. Many of the parsons, however, sublet them to other people as they can't afford to live in them themselves, now that their incomes have shrunk to a fraction of what they used to be. A fine house is little use without the money to keep it up."

"H'm!" Pat's voice was politely incredulous. "What sort of a fellow have you here?"

"Well-meaning. Industrious. Not at all brilliant."

A Honeymoon in Hiding

“Ah, there are too many of that kind. It’s the well-meaning bores who are responsible for the empty churches. There’s no spirit in them — no life — no inspiration. How can they expect to inspire their congregations ? ”

“Well, well, we mustn’t be too hard. They don’t expect enough, perhaps, and that’s why they fail. And the congregations don’t expect enough, either, and that’s why they’re bored. Wouldn’t you find it hard to preach to a congregation of yawning, restless folk who take out their watches before the text is half spoken ? Better preaching, yes ! It’s badly needed, but better listening too—better listeners.”

“Well, your vicar will have two good listeners to-night, at least. I shall listen as I have never listened to a sermon before. I shall remember it all my life. I wish he knew. Perhaps it would help him.”

“I’m sure it would. I’m sure it would.” The old man looked at the young girl with a gentle smile. He was old and lined ; his beard and hair looked

A Ramble

shaggy and untrimmed ; the linen coat was frayed at the seams, and his boots showed a conspicuous patch, but Gwen thought his face one of the sweetest she had ever seen.

“ Well,” he said, rising heavily from his seat, “ there go the bells. If you will wait one moment while I wash my hands and get into my coat, I’ll take you into the church, and you will have time to have a peep at the brasses. It’s an interesting old church, as you say, and I’m proud to show it. You see,” he glanced whimsically towards Pat, “ I’m the Opulent Parson.”

CHAPTER VI

THE WAXWORK MODEL

DURING the following week the Honey-mooners increased their knowledge of London by visits to many places not only unfashionable, but vagrant in character. Probably ninety-nine out of every hundred occupants of the great metropolis have at some period of their history uttered the aspiration, “I must *really* go to Covent Garden some morning!” but not even the remaining one out of the hundred has actually accomplished the expedition. That miracle of beauty, of fragrance, fresh as the dawn itself, is on exhibition every working-day of the year, yet the surrounding millions doze on in stuffy rooms and die content, never having beheld it. Not one person in a hundred, or even in a thousand, has ever uttered the resolve to visit the Sunday morning market in Petticoat Lane, yet if they did, of a surety it would provide an excursion

The Waxwork Model

which for novelty, amusement, and picturesque effects would be hard to equal in the luxurious west.

Our lovers made both these excursions, stepping out of their narrow doorway in the early morning light, the bride alert, the bridegroom yawning, and walking unafraid along the shrouded streets, secure as in a city of the dead.

One Friday morning, also, they visited the Caledonian Cattle Market, and lest the fastidious reader be horrified by the grossness of their taste, let it be hurriedly explained that the great square is on some occasions a mart, not for beasts, but for a medley of dry goods, laid out in tempting array on the ground itself. The word "tempting" is used advisedly, for be it known that in time not so far distant this same cattle market was the happy hunting ground of every curio-dealer in London, and many a treasure which was afterwards displayed in aristocratic shop windows had lain a week before in all humility on the ground-floor stall of a Hebrew vendor in the north. At

A Honeymoon in Hiding

the present moment this same vendor is regrettably educated to the value of antiques, but the astute buyer may still pass a happy hour wandering about the picturesque scene, and pick up a dozen thrilling bargains of household value. Wall-papers of patterns of a previous year are here offered for a penny a piece ; handsome papers, too, some of them—so handsome that our lovers, beholding them, figuratively gnashed their teeth at the remembrance of the prices which they themselves had paid for those other papers, not one whit better, which were at that moment embellishing their own walls. There also, in abundance, are to be found dear old brass candlesticks, such as adorned the mantelpieces of our sires ; dainty bits of pewter and china, and shaky old furniture, which a clever craftsman can soon revive into fresh life. The cattle market on Friday mornings is still a Mecca to that large body of the faithful who possess aspirations in advance of their purses.

But when spring is in the blood, the odour of spring in the air, there are times

The Waxwork Model

when even to a honeymoon couple the city palls, and that is the moment for discovering the wealth of beauty lying *perdu* in the suburbs, generously open to all and sundry. One does not speak of the many woods and gardens for which a key is necessary, purchasable for an infinitesimal guinea a year. There are many free open spaces—real woods ; sweet, dim groves of greenery, with dainty wild flowers rearing their heads among the luxurious undergrowth ; peaceful retreats where tired workers may lie at ease in rare holiday hours, and town-bred children taste the joys of the soil, while a few hundred yards away the motor-buses whirl through the dull suburban street, and naught but the sky remains of the wondrous natural world. And when one sees on the margin of such oases, the encroaching boards, “Freehold land to be sold for the erection of houses,” it’s, oh ! for the wealth of a Carnegie to conserve for ever to our people a boon so priceless for health, happiness, and education !

But the free lands of London, how rich

A Honeymoon in Hiding

they are, how beautiful, how varied! Wimbledon Common, with its wide and breezy stretches; Epping Forest, with its grand old trees, its badgers, its heronry; its herd of deer, famed as being the only remaining herd of the famous old English black-backed type. What though the wide central road be black with trippers—a short excursion to right or left will ensure silence and seclusion from the madding crowd. Greenwich Park, also, well deserves a visit, with its observatory, and its charming view over the horseshoe sweep of the Thames. For those who would not go so far afield, there is Hampstead Heath; for three days a year the joyful rendezvous of the people; for the other three hundred and sixty-two, peaceful and lovely, with wooded slopes, and sheltered dells, with winding paths, among the golden gorse, and flowering bushes bowing low to the surface of the pools. The West-End Londoner never visits Hampstead Heath, yet its beauties would evoke high praise if he met them a hundred miles away. After an hour spent

The Waxwork Model

on the Heath, a surprisingly good two-and-sixpenny dinner can be enjoyed at "Jack Straw's Castle," and if there be another hour to spare, why not turn downhill in the direction of that other hostel famed in popular verse as "The Old Bull and Bush," and almost opposite its threshold find the entrance to Golder's Hill, the beautiful estate bequeathed to the nation by its late owner, Sir Spencer Wells?

Our lovers spent the happiest of days in this charming retreat ; a retreat verily, for, with the exception of Saturdays and Sundays, there is no crowd of visitors. They were enchanted with the beauty of the old walled garden, with its wide herbaceous borders ; its blaze of spring bulbs ; promised themselves to come again when the great rose arbours should be covered with bloom, and decided that their own castle in Spain should also possess a Shakespeare bed, containing every plant or shrub mentioned in the great poet's works. When they were finished with the gardens, a pleasant meal served

A Honeymoon in Hiding

in the old mansion, now converted into a restaurant, supplied the necessary rest and refreshment, before they set forth again to wander over the green sloping park.

How good to think that all this beauty and greenery is London's own. That at the cost of a few pence for conveyance the occupants of grim, crowded lanes can be transported here to see the face of God in His creation. And blessed be the memory of all good men who have so enriched their kind.

In their wanderings about the suburbs there was one occupation which never failed to thrill our bride, and at the same time to reduce her husband to a condition of abject boredom and amaze, and this was the survey of unoccupied houses. To pass by a house to let, of any attractiveness whatever, which bore upon the placard the tempting words, "Caretaker within," was a feat practically beyond Mrs. Pat Hilbert's endurance. Over that house she raced from attic to cellar, exclaiming with joy at each fresh excellence,

The Waxwork Model

and groaning over the drawbacks as if here and nowhere else she were fated to live and die.

“If only a window could be knocked out in the side wall to let a little more light into the dining-room, it would really be perfect ! ” she would say meditatively. “Pat—how much should you think it would cost to put in a good-sized bay ? ”

“My dear, good girl, I haven’t the least idea,” her husband would patiently reply. “What *does* it matter ? We’ve got our own house. It’s nothing to us if the dining-room *is* dark ! ”

“No,” Gwen would assent meekly. “But still——” and half an hour later, with an air of sudden triumph, she would exclaim, “I have it ! I have it ! Widen the door into the dining-room, and put in glass panels in criss-cross squares. It would be far cheaper, and let in all the afternoon sun. Now, if only we could plan a dressing-room for you ! ”

The mysterious flights of the feminine mind are a puzzle to all young husbands, and Pat Hilbert marvelled with the best.

A Honeymoon in Hiding

He was a straight, hard-working fellow, with a determination to play the game, and a cheery content with his lot in life, which he took "as it came" in practical, common-sense fashion. Flights of imagination were not in his line ; but Gwen, it would seem, was continually soaring aloft on the wings of her Pegasus. It was one of her favourite amusements to imagine herself suddenly possessed of a fortune of several millions sterling, and she would make pencilled sums on the margins of newspapers to ascertain the yearly income to be derived therefrom, apportion its expenditure, and give detailed descriptions of the furnishings of the various mansions she would purchase, and of her own costume when presented at Court. On other occasions she would be more modest, and acknowledging the improbability of so large a legacy, content herself with weaving touching little histories in which she herself figured as heroine, and by her sweet qualities attracted the attention of a millionaire in disguise. A particularly happy effort pictured him as a shabby old man

The Waxwork Model

in an omnibus afflicted with a sudden haemorrhage of the nose, aggravated by the absence of a handkerchief to stem the flood. Then while other callous passengers sniggered and stared, she would hastily hand over her *mouchoir*, and offer him an arm to assist him to alight.

“Madam,” he would declare, “you at least have a true woman’s heart!” and a few months later a lawyer’s letter would bring the intelligence that he had died a peaceful and happy death, bequeathing a neat twenty thousand to his “humane benefactress.”

“Then!” said Gwen triumphantly, “we’d panel the dining-room, and buy a motor-car!”

These and other diverting day-dreams served to pass away many an hour, but if ever there were periods when the “deadly ennui” seemed within imaginable distance to our Lovers in Hiding, they were those long, chill hours when the rain poured and they were compelled to warm themselves at their oil stove, and to find amusement in a house

A Honeymoon in Hiding

furnished only with solid essentials. Gwen Hilbert was too clever and resourceful a creature to allow her husband to yawn away a whole afternoon, re-reading a newspaper, and standing with his hands in his pockets, staring through the window curtains. Willy-nilly, she dragged him out, knowing full well that after a few hours' absence he would return with zest, and rejoice in the comfort of the cosy little room. West-End matinées and exhibitions were necessarily debarred, but there remained a number of well-known places where the risk of detection was infinitesimal.

“ We'll go to the British Museum. In novels lovers always go to the British Museum and sit behind a statue when they want to meet in secret. I'll make a point of prowling into every out-of-the-way corner to see if I can surprise any of them ; and I'll bow to the mummy case ; you must bow too, then perhaps it'll be propitiated, and send us good luck ; and we'll go to the Tower and Madame Tussaud's. I haven't been to Madame Tussaud's since I was ten.

The Waxwork Model

I'd love to see it again. It would be safe enough, wouldn't it?"

"Goodness, yes! It's not holiday time. You won't meet anyone there but strangers and tourists," said Pat positively. "Well! If I've to take my choice between marble and wax, I choose wax to-day, as being a degree warmer. Always did think the Museum was a freezing hole!" So to Madame Tussaud's they repaired without further delay.

Strange how the old childish recollections stirred into life at the sight of the still, pink faces; the indescribable waxy smell! The Sleeping Beauty was sleeping still in her crystal case; the sub-conscious mind had treasured her memory all through the years of youth and maturity, and now awoke to acclaim her as a long-lost friend. The old gentleman was still sitting patiently on his seat! Bless his hoary pow! How many thousands of human creatures had he deluded since those far-off days?

Pat and Gwen enjoyed the waxworks like a couple of happy children, and were enthusiastic about the modern innovation

A Honeymoon in Hiding

of set pieces, or *tableaux*. Foremost among these, in that special year, was one purporting to represent a portion of the enclosure at Ascot, and the surprising up-to-dateness of the costumes worn by the ladies therein, won unmitigated praise from the bride, fresh from the purchase of her own trousseau.

“Look at the one in the grey satin ! *Look !* My white canvas has exactly that back ! . . . The green one has ducky sleeves. I wish I had had my blue. . . . *And* their hats—*and* their veils—so beautifully put on ! Look at that blue girl standing by herself looking at the race-card ! Isn’t she exactly like life ? I’ve a very good mind to cut short my blue sleeves, and— What is it ? ”

For answer her husband nipped her arm between finger and thumb, and pointed stealthily to the right. The sound of voices broke upon the ear ; between serried rows of effigies a female form approached, escorting two flaxen-haired children—a brief glimpse of her face showing as she bent and smiled. By all that was extraordinary

The Waxwork Model

and confounding—the well-known face of a friend of the family !

She was approaching along the aisle in which the Honeymooners themselves were standing ; there was no turning to right or left ; in another minute she would pass the screen of the next group and confront them face to face ! Gwen said no word. To the utter confounding of her spouse, she loosened her arm from his, dived nimbly beneath the protecting cord, and falling into position beside the Blue Girl of the Ascot Enclosure, slipped a hand through the waxen arm, and bent her own head over the extended card !

Of all the resourceful, quick-witted, audacious little wretches ! Trust her for getting out of a scrape if a way were to be found on land or sea ! The newly made husband was breathless with surprised admiration, but—but—what of himself ? What was he to do ? On second thoughts, wasn't it a pretty low-down thing to provide for herself and leave him in the lurch ? The faintest, smallest echo of a cough reached Pat's ear, and looking

A Honeymoon in Hiding

up, he beheld the latest addition to Madame Tussaud's collection grimacing violently in his direction. She wanted him to do something, of course—but what? He was bothered if he knew. Never *could* understand what people were after when they mouthed and scowled. No good trying to act a waxwork, too. Couldn't to save his life; and what else *was* there? There was nothing else!

In subsequent hectorings Gwen demonstrated several different ways in which discovery might have been avoided, but as none of them occurred at the moment to the person in need, the next moment brought with it the dreaded encounter.

“*You!*” ejaculated Mrs. Freeman, incredulously. “*You!* Pat Hilbert, of all people in the world! My dear, good man, I thought you were miles away enjoying your honeymoon. What does this mean? I met your cousin only yesterday, and she said—”

“Yes, yes. Just so! Of course, and so I am.” Pat's flushed conscious face was excellently in keeping with the sensations

The Waxwork Model

of a bridegroom unexpectedly run to earth. "Awful fag, but I—I had to come up to town. Things to do, you see—to look after—er—er—"

"Business! Yes, of course. Everything *must* give way to that, mustn't it?" assented Mrs. Freeman sympathetically. "I know what it is. We have scarcely ever had a holiday when my husband hasn't been summoned home in the middle, or obliged to shorten our stay at the end, but I imagined that professional men were exempt. In the middle of your honeymoon too! Too bad! And poor, dear Gwen! So sad for her to be left all by herself. I do hope you won't be kept here long."

"Oh, no. I shall join her to-day. She's all right! She—er—er—as a matter of fact, at the moment she's with a party of friends. Enjoying herself a treat."

Now, Pat Hilbert, being a well-principled young man, felt a distinct glow of satisfaction in the absolute verity with which he had contrived to parry these embarrassing questions, but Mrs. Freeman

A Honeymoon in Hiding

looked a trifle surprised and chilled. Strange how even the nicest young people were infected with modern ideas ! This young couple had appeared so simple, so attached, so content in each other in good old-world fashion, that it came with a shock to hear of the bride making merry with strangers while her newly made husband was away in town. Then, being a humorous soul, her eyes twinkled, and she said, smilingly :

“ Your business is finished, I suppose, and you have a few hours to put in before your return ? If one may ask, what in the name of all that is mysterious led you to spend them *here*, of all places in the world ? ”

Pat hesitated. The devil tempted him to declare that his train left from the Great Central, and that he had chosen the waxworks as the most adjacent place of amusement, but better counsels prevailed ; he recalled that so far honesty had protected him more surely than any fraud, and resolved to stick valiantly to the truth.

“ Well,” he said smilingly, “ since you

The Waxwork Model

ask me, I *did* want to put in the time, and there are precious few places in town where you can do so without the chance of running up against everyone you know."

"I see! I see!" Mrs. Freeman laughed—a cheery, understanding laugh. "And so you came to dear old Madame Tussaud's, and made sure of meeting wax images only. Too bad of me to choose just this afternoon to bring my babies to pay their first visit! But don't be afraid—I won't give you away. I promise faithfully not to mention to a soul that I have had a glimpse of you since you drove off for your honeymoon."

"Thanks, so much! I'll be grateful if you won't. I should get so horribly chaffed. We shall be 'At home' in another fortnight, and I hope you'll be one of our first callers. I must say 'Good-bye'—"

"Oh, not yet! Do come round with us, as you are here. It's not in the least likely that another friend will come along, and we should love to have your company. What's this group? It looks interesting!"

To his horror Pat saw the good lady's

A Honeymoon in Hiding

hand move towards the pince-nez which hung by a chain round her neck ; he dared not turn towards the new member of the group, but knowing the risible qualities of the lady in question, trembled for her composure.

“ Oh, there’s a—there’s a far better one farther along. Let me show you ! You can come back to this one later on. I should really like to show you the other before I leave,” he cried hastily, pushing forward with such determination that his companions were constrained to follow. To the turn of the aisle he went, and then safely round the corner, indulged in a flow of banal inanities about an undistinguished group, the while Mrs. Freeman listened with twinkling gravity. The poor dear fellow was so embarrassed he did not know *what* he was doing. But the poor dear fellow knew perfectly well ! He was talking against time, until the tip of a white hat had safely vanished into space, and then, and only then, did he bid his companions adieu.

Gwen was not in the Great Hall ; she

The Waxwork Model

was not in the vestibule beyond. At the street door he found her, crouching back on the seat of a taxi; crimson-cheeked, shaking, helpless with laughter.

“I’ve been a waxwork!” she gasped. “I’ve been a waxwork! Oh, Pat, it was the finest joke in the world to stand safely there, and listen to your cross-examination. You were splendid! Positively splendid! I nearly exploded with laughter. Oh, Pat, it’s the most delightful sensation in the world to have been wax, and come back to life and find yourself the wife of such a clever man. It’s been the most adventurous afternoon!”

“Quite so,” said Pat drily. “Would you mind telling me—I’m really curious to know—what on earth made you think of such a crack-brained scheme as going into that group at all?”

Gwen laughed happily, and mopped her wet eyes.

“Think?” she repeated calmly. “I never think! I just *do!*”

CHAPTER VII

DISCOVERED

TEN days had passed by, and the honeymoon lovers having spent a lazy afternoon indoors, were preparing to sally forth for a jovial dinner in the east.

The peaceful security of those few days had obliterated all fear of discovery, until one precaution after another had fallen into disuse. Instead of peering anxiously through the peep-holes in the back door, and creeping out one at a time, Gwen and Pat now prepared to start out together, and actually exchanged remarks in normal voices as they went. Pat turned the key in the lock, stood aside to allow his wife to pass, and Gwen, serene and smiling, stepped jauntily forward—into the very arms of a man in blue !

There he stood : blue-coated and ponderous ; his thick-soled boots planted well apart ; his large, shorn face alight with subtle glee ; “ Run ‘em to earth ! ” “ Got

Discovered

'em at last!" printed in capital letters on his smile. Pat jerked violently, muttered one lurid word, and stood still, chewing at his moustache. Gwen laid her hand on her heart, leant up against the door, and protested with a fine air of reproach:

"Oh! Oh, dear! What a start you gave me!"

The man in blue regarded her with small, cynical eyes.

"Apologise, I'm sure!" he said. "Sorry your nerves are so delicate. Wouldn't have thought it, if you hadn't told me. Nice little time you've been having, I don't think! Week-end cottage, I s'pose? Quiet and sheltered; side entrance from the grounds——"

"Stop that!" cried Pat suddenly. He had been for the moment too stupefied by surprise and annoyance to interfere, but now his voice rang out in so haughty a command that for a moment the constable was plainly impressed. Unfortunately, Gwen spoilt the effect by an inquiry put in her most artless and eager fashion:

"Do tell us! How did you find us out?"

A Honeymoon in Hiding

The man in blue swelled with importance, adopting his best police-court manner.

“ Hinformation from party next door. Hunhexplained nises in hempty 'ouse. Hodour of 'am through hupper winders. Vices ! ”

Gwen first sniggered helplessly, then shot a reproachful glance at Pat. In moments of emergency it is necessary to the feminine mind to have someone to blame, and although the suggestion of the rasher had come from herself, she was acutely mindful that it was Pat who had insisted that there could be no harm in opening the window a few inches top and bottom during the repast.

Constable 27 interpreted the glance as a sign of guilt, and continued sternly :

“ You'd better come quietly. We make it as pleasant as possible if you come quiet. Don't want to make it more public than you can help, I suppose ? Then come along without a fuss ! ”

“ Come along, WHERE ? ” gasped Gwen breathlessly. For the first time a hint of

Discovered

alarm mingled with the amusement on her face. She drew back a pace and stared with big, incredulous eyes in the policeman's face. What could he mean ?

“ ‘Ome,” replied the policeman suavely. “ ‘Ome, sweet ‘ome ! where people who ‘avn’t got one of their own, and goes to taking possession of hother peoples’ can be ‘oused and fed free of charge. I should have thought meself, a good-looking gal like you——”

“ Stop that ! ” thundered Pat once more. “ Heavens, man, can’t you tell a lady when you see one ? My wife and I are staying here because—er—er—because we choose to ! It is our own house. We have a right to live in it if we choose. I am Dr. Hilbert. I’ll show you my card.” He dived his hand into his coat pocket, then suddenly paused and frowned angrily at the remembrance that his card-case, with other superfluous trifles lay with the rest of his baggage at Waterloo Station. “ Hang it ! I haven’t a card with me. I left them——”

“ At ‘ome. On the top of the peanner !

A Honeymoon in Hiding

You *would* do!" remarked the constable eloquently. "Don't try to bunkum me, if *you* please, young man. I've my duty to do, and I mean to do it. You come along quiet with me—"

Pat muttered violently beneath his breath. What a fool he had been! What a doubly, trebly, distilled fool to give in to Gwen's mad scheme, and imagine for a moment that they could succeed in escaping detection! Here was a pretty mess! How on earth was he going to convince this jack-in-office of the truth of his unproved word, in the face of such damning evidence as this quiet slinking out of a back door? He cudgelled his brains for inspiration, but only the feeblest of ideas occurred, so feeble that they were rejected as soon as thought of. For a moment he considered the possibility of fighting it out, but the policeman looked a formidable customer, and at the best the position could be only temporarily improved. He cocked an accusing eye at Gwen, as who should say: "This is your doing, madam! Get us out of the scrape

Discovered

as best you may," and Gwen, reading its meaning, made haste to obey.

"But we *are* Mr. and Mrs. Hilbert ! It's perfectly true ! You must know that we are telling the truth. The London police are the finest and most intelligent body of men in the world. Everyone says so. You read it in the newspapers once a week at least, and you must be a picked officer to be on this beat. Now, look at us in your fine and intelligent manner, and say if you *really* think we look like adventurers, who would want to sleep in empty houses that didn't belong to us ! You see thieves and cheats and stowaways every day of your life. . . . Tell me honestly . . . *do* they look like us ? "

Constable 27 burrowed his chin in his neck and did as he was requested. He saw a tall, slight man in a shabby tweed suit, and a remarkably pretty girl in navy blue serge ; and, possessing a modicum of the sense with which Gwen had credited him, he saw something else, too : that delicate, indefinable *je-ne-sais-quoi* which distinguishes one class from another, be they

A Honeymoon in Hiding

arrayed in garments ever so similar. He saw ; he realised ; but on one hand he knew that offences against the law are by no means confined to one section of the community, and on the other he was far from ready to acknowledge himself in the wrong and to relinquish the chance of a case. A momentary pause was succeeded by a solemn wag of the head.

“ Hasseveration,” he pronounced solemnly, “ hasseveration his not hevidence ! Hin the habsence of proof, the law is bound to hact upon hevidence. If you come quietly, I’ll make it as comfortable as possible.”

It was at this point that the idea of bribery entered Pat’s brain. He thrust his hand into his waistcoat pocket, fingered a sovereign, and held it out on a stealthy hand.

“ Look here, I say. . . . Let’s put an end to this ! . . . I am telling you the truth, and you’ll only injure your own reputation if you insist upon playing the fool. Let us pass, please ! I don’t care to keep my wife hanging about in this lane. I shall see you again, later on.”

Discovered

But Constable 27 indignantly waved aside the offered tip. He straightened his back, and, as Gwen declared in after descriptions of the scene, "swelled wisible" inside his tight, blue coat. His dignity was wounded—the dignity of the Force—and his heart hardened towards the offender.

"That will be used in hevidence against you, young man! Heverything you say will be brought forward, so I'd hadvise you to keep quiet. Hany more himpudence or 'esitation, and I'll whistle for a mate! Hevery consideration I was willing to show for the sake of the young woman; but when it comes to bribery and corruption——"

"Yes, indeed. You ought to be *ashamed*, Patrick!" cried Gwen traitorously. "He didn't mean it, officer; he didn't indeed. It is only because he is upset and worried. . . . You are misjudging him, you see, just as he misjudged you. . . . What *can* I do to convince you? . . . There must be some way of proving the truth!" She screwed her forehead, and pursed her lips in anxious

A Honeymoon in Hiding

consideration for a minute—but a minute only. Then, like a flash of sunlight came the looked-for inspiration. “I have it! I have it! Come into the house with us, officer, for just two minutes, and I’ll prove to you without a shadow of doubt that we are really Dr. and Mrs. Hilbert, living peacefully in hiding in our own house. . . . You don’t mind giving us just two minutes?”

Constable 27 cast one keen, appraising glance at Pat’s bulk, evidently satisfied himself that he was the better man, and signified a dignified consent, whereupon Gwen led the way into the upstairs den, followed by the two equally mystified and curious men. Pat had no idea of the form in which proof was to be offered, until he saw his wife approach the pile of newspapers in the cupboard, when he reviled himself for a thick-skulled idiot for not having had a similar inspiration.

“You see, officer,” explained Gwen deferentially, “this newspaper comes from Brainford, in Essex, the home of Dr. Hilbert’s parents. As they are some of the

Discovered

oldest residents, there is a whole column devoted to the account of our wedding. There it is: 'Marriage of Dr. Patrick Hilbert to Miss Gwendolen Nugent'—that's me! 'A large assembly of friends and relations . . . wedding presents costly and numerous. . . . Dr. Hilbert has taken a house in — Street for the convenience of his high-class and increasing practice. . . . Charming bevy of bridesmaids in white chiffon and wreaths of roses. . . .' You see! A whole column of description."

"That's as it may be, mum. I never denied that I knows of that the marriage took place. The 'appy couple are now enjoying of their honeymoon."

"They are, indeed! You're perfectly right. A rather unusual honeymoon, but most enjoyable and exciting. There's something else I want to show you. Down here!"

Gwen turned and patted the newspaper with exasperating coolness. That was so like a woman: to play with her triumph, and gloat over a deliberate and artistic *dénouement*. If it had been left to Pat he

A Honeymoon in Hiding

would have seized the sheet, thrust it in his accuser's face with a "See that, you stupid ass!" which would have been as the trumpet of battle. As it was, Constable 27 regarded the medallion portraits of the bride and bridegroom, as published by the *Brainford Herald*, with an expression of ludicrous embarrassment and contrition.

"Well, to be sure! Think of that, now! Arks your pardon, I'm sure. 'Ope you will understand, sir, that 'aving received hinformation, I 'ad no chice. 'Ope the lady will overlook it, and—"

"The lady is very happy to find that her house is so effectually guarded!" cried Gwen in her most gracious manner. "Now, I'm going to give you a glass of wine, officer, to drink our health, and my husband will tell you how it happens that we came to be staying here privately. We realise, of course, that it has a peculiar effect—"

So it came to pass that Constable 27 sipped a glass of claret in company with Dr. and Mrs. Pat Hilbert, lent a sympathetic ear to the history of the stolen notes,

Discovered

and entered into a conspiracy to lull the fears of the occupant "next door."

"In another couple of days our time will be up, and we shall be coming home in state. Keep her quiet till then, there's a good fellow, with any story you like—it's all one to me. Tell her we are the caretakers, if you like. It's perfectly true."

"Right, sir ; quite right ! Hinformation correct has to parties in 'ouse next door. Further hinformation transpires, 'owever, that parties are located with permission of 'Ilbert himself. 'Ow would that do ? "

"Capital ! Capital !" Pat laughed heartily. Once more his arm swung out in casual, off-hand fashion. This time the arm of Constable 27 swung out to meet it ; their hands touched, and parted.

"I drink your very good 'ealth !" said the man in blue.

CHAPTER VIII

END OF THE HONEYMOON

IT was the hour for luncheon—the last, the very last meal to be consumed by Mr. and Mrs. Hilbert as Honeymooners in Hiding. As was meet on such an occasion, the *menu* had been provided by the simple means of sweeping the cupboard bare, so that no traces of invasion might remain. Items: Two and a half sardines (battered), left high and dry at the bottom of a tin; the small half of a sixpenny glass of potted shrimps; one (over) poached egg; three slices of cold ham; a rind of cheese; one apple; two cups of coffee (weak).

Now it is one of the fundamental and irrevocable differences between the sexes that every woman worth her salt adores a picnic meal, while every man abhors it from his heart, so that it can readily be believed that our Honeymooners regarded the viands spread before them with widely differing feelings.

End of the Honeymoon

“What a *lovely* scrappy meal! I do adore a lunch of scraps! Don’t you?” cried Gwen.

“Um!” replied Pat vaguely; then, scenting suspicion in his wife’s eyes, made haste to affect a fictitious glee. “Rippin’!” he cried, and finished the sardines at a gulp.

Gwen toyed daintily with the potted shrimps, disintegrating the tiny pink rolls, and spreading them at intervals on a slice of brown bread and butter. It was no novel experience to her. She was no gossamer nymph, but a fine, well-built, up-standing English girl, yet time and again she had survived the scrimmage of a day at half-yearly sales on no other sustenance than a buttered roll and a pot of shrimps. She would cheerfully expend her substance on unnecessary trifles, thrillingly reduced from two-and-six to one-and-eleven-three; but the price of a solid lunch would have lain heavy as a crime on her feminine conscience. Now, in her own home, she drank her weak coffee and nibbled her bread with an air of complete content; but as the meal drew towards a close a shadow fell

A Honéymoon in Hiding

across her face, she grew silent and distract, and from time to time her shoulders heaved in melancholy sighs.

“ Oh ! ” she cried suddenly, in heart-rending lament. “ It’s the last, the very last meal we shall ever have together as Honeymooners in Hiding ! It’s past—it’s gone—we may live to be a hundred years old, but it can never, never come back. Pat, Pat, our honeymoon is over ! ”

“ Don’t you believe it. We shall be back again in a couple of days, and as happy as ever—happier ! Our honeymoon is going to last all our lives,” declared the bridegroom sturdily. But the bride refused to be comforted.

“ Oh, you may say so, but I *know* ! It will never be the same. We shall never be all alone again, you and I, with nothing and nobody to think about in the whole wide world, but just our own two selves. We shall be back here—yes ! But there will be servants, and callers, and patients, and invitations, and interruptions every hour of the day, and—and—taxes and bills : household bills, *grocer’s* bills—I *know*

End of the Honeymoon

them!—mounting up higher and higher each week, and you will bite your lips and say, 'My dear——'" Gwen drew up in a short, dramatic pause. " *Pat!* promise me faithfully, on your honour as a British subject, that, no matter *how* high they get, you will *never* address me as 'My dear'!"

"Er—er—certainly not, if it annoys you." Pat was quite startled to think how easily he might have fallen into this unpardonable sin. "But I really can't see why not. It seems to me a very innocent expression."

"It's not!" Gwen assured him. "It's the very reverse. It affects to be a term of endearment, but in reality it's *reeking* with deceit. 'My dear' is what husbands call the wives whom they *don't* love; or, if they *do* love them, they save up 'My dear' for moments of exasperation, when they would like to shake them, but daren't! You will often feel exasperated with me. I'll confess, if you won't throw it up at me, that I am enough to exasperate a saint at times; but if you care for peace, steer clear of 'My dear'! Now, like an angel,

A Honeymoon in Hiding

get your things together while I wash up and then we'll be ready to drive to the hotel in time for tea."

Before leaving the hotel at H—— the bride and bridegroom had each dispatched long and dutiful letters to their relations, warning them in each case that no further communications than picture post-cards need be looked for during the rest of the honeymoon. It was unnecessary to divulge that the said post-cards were all written at the same time as the letters themselves, and committed to the charge of a friendly chambermaid, with instructions to post one regularly at intervals of two days. With one exception these post-cards contained only a few words of greeting, but the last in order bore an important message:—

“Expect to arrive home at six o'clock on Wednesday evening. Kindly send in servants and prepare.”

A letter of reminder had ensured the prompt posting of this message, which could therefore be counted upon to arrive at its destination on the following morning, and pending the two days of preparation the

End of the Honeymoon

site of the honeymoon was to be shifted to the Hôtel Métropole. Recognition was now a matter of unimportance, and as the couple drove through the busy streets each felt the stirrings of pleasurable excitement. Before Pat's eyes there rose the vision of the long, brightly lighted restaurant ; he saw himself seated before a daintily spread table, running a covetous eye over the *menu*, holding the wine-card in his hand. Gwen was oblivious to creature comforts ; she thought with delight that at last she could wear one of her real new trousseau frocks ; decided on the pink, with the shot-rose scarf ; saw a vision of herself walking down the crowded room, and was conscious to the very curl on her neck of the meaning of the whispered comments, “What a *pretty* girl ! ”

Under these happy circumstances it can be believed that it was in the highest of spirits that our lovers arrayed themselves for the table d'hôte dinner a few hours later on. Bags and boxes had been rescued from the left-luggage office *en route* to the hotel ; and it was delightful to meet all the dainty

A Honeymoon in Hiding

new possessions once more, and have the choice of a dozen garments, after living practically in one for a fortnight on end.

Pat was shut up in his dressing-room with instructions not to dare to come out until he was summoned, so that the full blast of his wife's beauty might fall upon him unprepared. The result was all that could be desired, and even Gwen's thirst for compliments was assuaged by the assertion that never since the earth was created had such a lovely vision greeted the eyes of man, when the bridegroom meekly requested a little attention for himself.

"Will I do? Shaved myself again to do you honour. Tie all right? Spoilt two before I could get one to please me."

Gwen nodded with queenly patronage. "Quite! Your bows have always such nice little waists. Can't think how you tie them with your great fingers. But your coat, dear! It's very creased."

"What could you expect after being jammed up in my bag for a fortnight on end? I've not worn this coat since the night before we were married. What an

End of the Honeymoon

age ago it seems—prehistoric history—eh ?
The creases will come out all right in the
air. Shake it a bit—eh ? ”

Pat took hold of the silk-lined tails and flipped them violently to and fro. Suddenly, as he did so, his face changed ; he stood rigid in the centre of the room, and gasped out his wife's name.

“ Gwen ! ”

“ What ? ”

“ GWEN ! ”

“ WHAT ? ”

“ M—m—my—*Look !* In my pocket !
My tail pocket ! Lying there all the time !
My—*pocket-book !* ”

He held it out towards her ; she leapt at him and tore it from his hands ; she flicked over the pages, thrust her fingers into the pockets, shook it over the floor, and out they fluttered—one, two, three bank-notes—crisp, little rustling insignificant slips of paper, which represented a whole fifty pounds in golden coin of the realm !

There they lay on the drab hotel carpet, while the husband and wife gasped, and

A Honeymoon in Hiding

stared, and gasped again, and laughed, and exclaimed, and danced, and waved their hands, and behaved generally as any other happy, natural young couple would have done under the same circumstances.

“Safe—safe—all the time! Not lost at all! Lying in that pocket when you said you were sure—positively sure—”

“So I was—so I was! I could have sworn that I took it out, and put it in the pocket of my new tweed coat; but it was the morning of my wedding. Bates was in the room chaffing me all the time I packed. I didn’t know if I was standing on my head or my heels. Then when it couldn’t be found I thought of the crowd, and that fellow who knocked against me, and made sure— And it was lying here all the time, safe and sound! . . . Oh, my poor little girl, and you might have had your honeymoon after all! ”

“I’ve had it—I’ve had it! The loveliest one that was ever known!” declared Gwen, and promptly, mysteriously, began to cry. Just why she, who had taken the great loss with a smile, and had smiled

End of the Honeymoon

persistently throughout the Honeymoon in Hiding, should have dissolved into tears at the glad moment of discovery, is one of the inexplicable mysteries which will remain with us so long as young and charming women continue to inhabit the earth. Cry she did, however, but temperately, judiciously, with a careful dab of the eyes with a tiny lace handkerchief, since it behoved a bride on the eve of her first appearance in public in a pink trousseau frock to take care that the effect should not be spoiled by tear-stained eyes.

“It’s only because—because I’m so *glad!*” she exclaimed to her astonished mate. “I always do when I’m too happy. We *are* the luckiest couple; it’s too perfectly lovely to be true! Never say again that it’s impossible to eat your cake and have it, for we’ve *done* it! We’ve had our honeymoon and kept our money; we’ve been as happy as two mortal creatures could possibly be, and we’ve kept a nest-egg to tide us over tight places in the future. *Pat!* you’re a lucky man. Aren’t you glad you married me?”

A Honeymoon in Hiding

Dr. Patrick Hilbert declared with much emphasis that he was ; he went on declaring it regularly throughout the years ; he is declaring it at this present moment, when as a busy and successful London practitioner his happiest remembrances are of a certain fortnight when he lay *perdu* in his own house, slinking out of back doors to attend East-End theatres, and feasting on scraps cooked on a little oil stove, in the company of the sweetest and cheeriest little bride who ever shared a Honeymoon in Hiding !

THE END

PRINTED BY CASSELL & CO., LTD., LA BELLE SAUVAGE, LONDON, E.C.

Schleusing

